

Solutions to improve salaries for lecturers in public universities in Vietnam today

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ABSTRACT : At present, the salaries of lecturers in public universities in Vietnam are generally quite low. This is an important reason that leads to the unimproved training quality, and the lecture halls do not attract lecturers who are passionate about the profession. For teachers to feel secure in their work, raising salaries is important. The article refers to some solutions to increase faculty salaries, such as changing salary mechanisms appropriately, enhancing financial autonomy and efforts to attract external sources of income for public universities.

Keywords -solutions, salaries for lecturers, public universities in Vietnam

I. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, teachers are a profession that is always respected and honored by the society. In “Vietnam’s Customs”, cultural researcher Phan Ke Binh wrote: “Students must respect teachers, must treasure teachers' blankets, especially teachers who teach letters must be respected more” [2, p.156]. The teachers are likened to the student's parents: “The old teaching is a dignified position, the teachers still take the position of the primacy, but the students also respect it with all their heart. Students often see the teachers as a fathers” [1, p.238]. Although being respected, in the history of Vietnam’s education, becoming a teacher is not the goal of the learner. During feudal times, teachers were mainly grapevines who did not pass the exam for mandarin and then went to open universities to teach. In recent years, the entry scores for pedagogical universities in Vietnam have also been alarmingly low [14]. There are many reasons for that situation, despite being studious, Vietnamese people are not interested in becoming teachers, of which the main reason is low salaries in the education sector that do not meet the living demand. In the scope of this article, we discuss the issue of faculty salaries and some solutions to increase salaries of lecturers in public universities in Vietnam in the current period.

II. HEADINGS

1. Identification of university lecturers

The current national education system of Vietnam is based on the Decision No. 1981/QĐ-TTg and the Decision No. 1982/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Accordingly, the educational levels and training levels of the national education system include: a) Preschool education includes kindergarten and preschool education; b) General education includes primary education, secondary education and high school education; c) Vocational education training elementary, intermediate and college levels; d) Higher education training courses bachelor, master and doctoral degrees [12]. In particular, to be granted a university degree, learners need to complete minimum academic volume of 120 credits, in addition: “Confirm the trainee's training level has solid practical knowledge, comprehensive theoretical knowledge, in-depth knowledge of a training discipline, and basic knowledge of social sciences, politics and law; have cognitive skills related to criticism, analysis, and synthesis; professional practice skills, necessary behavioral communication skills to perform complex tasks; work independently or in groups in changing working conditions, take personal responsibility, take responsibility with the group in guiding, disseminating and conveying knowledge, being in the training industry, supervising other people to perform the duties service”[13].

According to the Government of Vietnam's university network plan, higher education institutions in Vietnam include university systems that gather many member universities together with specialized and multi-disciplinary universities and academies. In the scope of this article, we focus on Vietnamese public universities. Now Vietnam has 5 key public university systems of the country, each system divides many member universities specializing in training and researching a specific group of disciplines to create its strengths, including Vietnam National University-Hanoi, University of Thai Nguyen, University of Hue, University of Danang, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City; Five universities at the regional level are Tay Bac University, Vinh University, Nha Trang University, Tay Nguyen University, Can Tho University. In addition to hundreds of universities, [15]. According to education reports, in the first decade of the 21st century, "Vietnam's higher education has developed rapidly, the scale of higher education has increased by 2.35 times. In 2010 the number of university and college students reached 2,162,101, or 227 students per 10,000 people, or the number of students per youth of university age ((Gross Enrolment Ratio – GER) was 24. The rate of trained workers made up for 40%" [5, p.7]. Achieved these remarkable numbers in higher education, besides students' efforts, necessarily to mention the role of university lecturers.

According to Article 54, Law on Higher Education 2012 (amended and supplemented in 2018), lecturers are understood as: "People with transparent personalities; have good qualities and morals; have enough health to perform the task; have qualifications meeting the provisions of this Law, the regulations on the organization and operation of the higher education institutions" [10,31]. Besides, the Law also stipulates, "The minimum qualification of lecturers at university level is master's degree, except for the title of teaching assistant; the degree of the title lecturer master's degree, doctoral degree is doctoral. Higher education institutions give priority to recruiting people with doctoral degrees as lecturers; develop and give incentives to the leading professors to develop training disciplines" [10,42].

Also according to this Law, the duties of lecturers are reflected through the following basic contents: - Lecturers ensure the teaching based on the goals and develop the training program to ensure full implementation, guaranteeing the education quality; - Conducting research and development of scientific application and technology transfer, guaranteeing the training quality; - Lecturers need to constantly make efforts to learn and foster to improve their political theory, expertise, profession and teaching methods; participating in practical activities to improve the quality of training and scientific research.

Thus, it can be understood that lecturers in public universities are teachers who are in charge of teaching and training a particular discipline or a certain subject at universities, colleges, and receiving salaries and other regimes from the state budget. In addition to their professional qualifications, lecturers must also meet the requirements of foreign language and informatics standards to assume their roles and duties.

III. Salary of university lecturers

At present, the salaries of lecturers of public universities in Vietnam are based on Decree No. 204/2004/ND-CP of the Government and Circular number 40/2020/TT-BGDĐT of the Ministry of Education and Training and many other normative documents. According to Circular No. 40/2020/TT-BGDĐT and other regulations and professional titles of teaching staff in public higher education institutions including Senior Lecturers; Principal Lecturers, lecturers and teaching assistant. At the same time, the Circular also details how to rate these subjects. The professional titles of teaching staff specified in this Circular are entitled to apply the professional payroll to staff and public employees in the State's non-business units. Particularly: The title of Senior Lecturer (grade I) is applied the salary coefficient from 6.20 to 8.00 (about VND 9 -12 million). Job title of Principal Lecturer (grade II) is applied the salary coefficient from 4.40 to 6.78 (about VND 6.5 to 10 million). Titles of Lecturer (grade III) and Teaching Assistant (grade III) are applied the salary coefficient from 2.34 to 4.98 (about VND 3.5 to 7.5 million) [6].

However, in order to have the aforesaid salary, lecturers are not only required to complete the required number of lectures, but also to meet the standards of training and retraining. Particularly, Requirements for the title of lecturer (grade III) include a) Having a master's degree or higher in accordance with the job position, discipline or specialized teaching; b) Possessing a certificate of training in qualifications for professional titles of lecturers (class III). The requirements for the title of Principal Lecturer (class II) include a) Having a master's degree or higher relevant to the job position, discipline or specialized teaching; b) Having a certificate of fostering qualification standards for professional titles of Principal Lecturer(class II). The requirements for the title of Senior Lecturer (grade I) include a) having a doctorate degree suitable for the job position, discipline or specialized teaching;

To change professional titles to enjoy higher salaries, lecturers must take examinations in accordance with the Law on Public Employees and many other guiding documents [7] [9]. However, it does not mean that all teachers are allowed to participate in examinations to improve public servant rank at any time. In addition to requirements for competency and attached certificates, lecturers must meet the regulated timing. Particularly, lecturers who want to take the examination or consider being promoted to resign from the title of lecturer (grade

III), to the professional title of Principal Lecturer (grade II), must have time to hold the title of Lecturer (class III) or equivalent at least full 09 (nine) years for holders of master's degrees, 06 (six) years at full for holders of doctoral degrees; in which must have at least 01 year (12 months at full) hold the title of Lecturer (grade III), up to the date of the deadline to submit the application for the examination registration or rank promotion consideration. Similarly, from the Lecturer grade II to grade I lecturers must hold the job title of the Principal Lecturer (grade II) or the equivalent of at least 06 (six) years at full; which must have at least 01 year (12 months at full) hold the title of Lecturer (grade II) up to the deadline of submitting the examination registration or rank promotion consideration [6].

Thus, the salary of the lecturers of public universities depends on the salary grade, salary scale, salary coefficient, etc. To increase the salary, lecturers are required to pass the examinations to increase the rank and the salary coefficient as well in accordance with to the service year. It is required teachers to work for a long time in the sector and meet the requirements of competency and foreign language and informatics certificates.

IV. Some solutions to improve salaries for teachers

Through the salaries paid to lecturers in the professional titles of senior lecturers, principal lecturers and lecturers as mentioned above, it may be seen that the salaries of lecturers in Vietnamese public universities is too low compared with people with similar qualifications in other disciplines. A comparison pointed out, "An auditor working for a foreign auditing company in Vietnam has a salary of several thousand USD per month, a skilled computer engineer easily has a salary of over VND 10 million per month; Meanwhile, the salaries of leading professors in Vietnam, including allowances, should not exceed USD 500-600 per month "[16]. Lecturers in universities are people with high professional qualifications from the Master or higher, in order to improve their professional qualifications and meet other requirements of the job, lecturers need to complete a lot of courses and diplomas and certificates. The aforesaid salary is not appropriate with the level and time that lecturers spend to complete the job. This is a major cause of the situation that although the number of universities increases, the number of students has also increased, the quality of training and the quality of the teaching staff are not high, "the quantity and quality of the teaching staff did not increase as planned: the ratio of students/ lecturer was still as high as 30:1 (the plan was 20:10), the ratio of doctorate/ lecturers decreased from 20% to 14% (the plan was 25%) "[5, p.8]. In order to attract high-quality human resources into teaching services, to encourage lecturers to improve their competency and maintenance with the profession, we would like to suggest the following solutions:

First, a more reasonable salary policy for university lecturers should be set up.

Although Vietnam underwent four salary reforms (by 1960, 1985, 1993 and 2003), the minimum salary increased from VND 730,000/month (2010) to VND 1,490,000/month (2019) but the salaries of civil servants, public employees in general and lecturers in particular are not high, the minimum salaries and allowances of the lecturers of public universities are not higher than the salaries and allowances of civil servants and employees of other professions, while they have to meet many requirements, under pressure to provide specific services. This is also recognized and specified in the Communist's Party and Government of Vietnam in the Conclusion No. 23-KL/TW, "Salary policy has not encouraged the staff, civil servants and employees to be stable and be dedicated to their work. The current minimum wage still has not met the minimum demands. The current wage relation is still average and much lower than the wage relation in the market. The table system salary scale for the staff, civil servants, public employees and the armed forces has been still complicated and out-of-date. The promotion and rank promotion has not met the requirements of the job position, has not encouraged the staff, civil servants and public employees to strive to fulfill their tasks" [3].

Realizing the great motivation of good implementation of regimes and policies, particularly salaries, lecturers will feel secure in their work and contribute their strength to the education cause, over the years, the State and Government of Vietnam step by step completed the system of scientific lecturer's table system salary scale, rationally. Typically, in the Law on Education, Article 76 stipulated, "Teachers are graded salary in accordance with the job position and the profession; to be given priority to enjoy special occupational allowances in accordance with the Government's regulations" [11, p.30] Article 77 of this Law also stipulates, "The State has a policy to recruit, use, treat and ensure necessary physical and spiritual conditions for teachers to fulfill their roles and duties" [11, p.30]. Resolution No. 27-NQ/TW also outlined the specific orientations on salaries for the staff, civil servants and public employees, including university lecturers, "Since 2021, to apply a new uniform salary regime for the staff, civil servants, public employees and armed forces in the entire political system; In 2021, the lowest salaries of the staff, civil servants and public employees will be equal to the average lowest wages in all regions of the enterprise sector; By 2025, the lowest salaries of the staff, civil servants and public employees will be higher than the average lowest wages in all regions of the enterprise sector; By 2030, the lowest salaries of the staff, civil servants and public employees will be equal to or higher than the lowest wages in the highest regions of the enterprise sector" [4].

Although there have been instructions from the State and the Government, the roadmap for improving salaries for civil servants and public employees in general and lecturers of public universities in particular is still slow and has not met the requirements of workers. This resulted from both objective and subjective reasons. In the coming time, the implementation of salary policies and guideline should be more active and effective to improve salaries and enhance the lives of lecturers in public universities.

Secondly, the demand to strengthen autonomy mechanisms for public universities, particularly financial autonomy.

In Vietnam today, there are two main operating mechanisms for public universities: state control and autonomy. To improve the quality of training and improve salaries for faculty, the financial autonomy of universities is important. For many years, higher education in Vietnam has still implemented a policy of low tuition fees to guarantee the poor students have access to higher education. However, such thinking has caused a great financial burden on universities. At present, the Government of Vietnam is actively reforming the higher education system by empowering universities. Pursuant to the amended Law on Higher Education No. 34/2018/QH14, Article 32, "Autonomy in assets and finance includes promulgating and organizing the implementation of internal regulations on revenue, management and using financial resources, assets; attracting development investment capital; policy of tuition fees, scholarships for students and other policies in accordance with the law". In recent years, many public universities in Vietnam have initially implemented financial autonomy, accordingly, the salaries of faculty staff have increased remarkably. According to recent survey data, "About 85% of universities reflected that the financial autonomy policy has had a positive impact on the income of the staff. University lecturers (most universities pay an additional income coefficient for employees about 1-1.5 times the income from minimum salaries). Typically, some public universities were allowed to pilot the application of a financial autonomy mechanism to guarantee recurrent expenditure completely, with conditions to pay income many times higher than income from minimum salary, such as International University, HCM International University,[17]. It may be seen that the effectiveness of university autonomy was obvious, however in reality, at present, most universities are not bold enough to exercise autonomy due to lack of capacity and mechanism barriers. Most of the activities of the universities still have to be reported and approved by the superior management agencies such as opening a training branch, requiring permission from the Ministry of Education and Training; increase or decrease tuition fees must apply for permission from the Ministry of Finance; infrastructure construction, equipment procurement and other activities must also be applied through different management agencies with too many documents and administrative procedures; the salary promotion for lecturers require approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs, etc.

The financial autonomy mechanism has had a positive effect on many aspects of public universities, especially the increase in faculty salaries in appropriate with their contributions. Implementing salary policy reform, in which the principal has the right to negotiate salaries and allowances with lecturers in public universities, has motivated the staff and lecturers to be enthusiastic about the profession. To improve the quality of university faculty requires many factors, but salary and wages are the first and decisive factor.

Thirdly, attracting outsourcing investment to increase income for lecturers.

At present, public universities are funded by the state budget. Article 96 of the Law on Education clearly stated, "The State gives top priority to the allocation of the education budget, guaranteeing that the state budget spent on education and training is at least 20% of the total state budget expenditure" [11, p36]. Under the current conditions, with the limited capacity of the state budget and the requirement of balancing between industries and occupations, it will be difficult for the State to renew and complete the salary policy for teachers. However, facing of the requirements of educational innovation and development and the current situation of teachers, it is required to create many ways to improve teacher salaries.

First of all, universities are more proactive in orienting the development of training, scientific research and technology transfer to expand and exploit non-business revenue sources. Among them, proactively deciding research direction and participating in science and technology tasks, thereby commercializing research results, linking with businesses to create practical value from the works. Scientific research will bring huge revenue to public universities. In addition, it is required that public universities expand their training sizes in accordance with social demands, strengthen joint training activities to improve the training quality, to attract students in the context of many universities open the same training code for many types of profession groups recently. Besides, it is required to encourage public universities to increase the salary fund of the unit. The State is also required to consider and assign a reasonable financial responsibility between the State and the people in educational activities; to implement the course of educational socialization.

V. CONCLUSION

It can be said that, when comparing to other countries in the region and many other countries in the world, the salaries of lecturers of public universities in Vietnam are still quite low. Lack of salary policy for teachers is one of the main causes of many weaknesses and limitations of education. Aimed at improving the quality of

education, the improvement of a salary policy for teachers plays an important role. Having a reasonable salary policy, enabling universities to have autonomy in finance and generating revenues from sources other than student tuition will be the key solutions to improving salaries for lecturers. To implementing the matter, it is required to complete the mechanisms and policies of the State and the initiative of public universities in Vietnam.

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