Understanding lecturers' Engagement in Service Learning: Insights from Vietnamese Higher Education

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Abstract

The Vietnamese government has prioritized transformative reforms in higher education to enhance the quality of human resources, with the Vietnamese Qualifications Framework (VQF) serving as a cornerstone of these efforts. The VQF outlines the expected knowledge, skills, and social responsibility for graduates, driving necessary changes in teaching practices to align with these desired graduate attributes. Service-learning, which integrates the application of academic knowledge with the cultivation of social responsibility, presents a promising approach to innovating pedagogical practices in Vietnamese universities. This qualitative study investigates factors influencing lecturers' engagement in implementing service-learning within the context of Vietnamese higher education. The findings identify key barriers, such as limited institutional support and workload constraints, alongside motivators like professional development opportunities and improved student outcomes. Addressing these barriers while leveraging the identified motivators is crucial for fostering lecturer engagement in service-learning. By doing so, service-learning can significantly contribute to the holistic development of graduates and align with Vietnam's broader educational reform goals.

Keywords

Service Learning, Lecturer Engagement, Vietnamese Higher Education.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, Vietnam has undergone significant economic, political, and social transformations, emerging as a rising middle-income country. The education system has played a pivotal role in this progress, contributing significantly to human capital development and driving national growth (Parajuli et al., 2020). However, despite these advancements, the education sector faces several challenges. Firstly, the curriculum remains largely outdated, emphasizing theoretical knowledge over practical application and critical thinking (Le et al., 2020). Traditional teaching methods often rely on rote memorization, neglecting the development of active learning, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, the education system currently falls short in cultivating essential skills such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, as well as fostering social responsibility and ethical conduct among students (Le et al., 2020). This leaves graduates inadequately prepared for the changing labor market. To address these challenges, the Vietnamese government has prioritized the modernization of education and training through key policy initiatives. Resolution No. 29/NQ-TW of the Vietnamese Central Committee of the Communist Party emphasizes the need to shift from a knowledge-transmission model to one that prioritizes the holistic development of students' abilities and qualities (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013). Building upon this, Decision No. 1982/QD-TTg introduced the Vietnamese Qualifications Framework (VQF), a comprehensive system that standardizes qualifications across all levels of education. The VQF establishes clear and measurable Expected Learning Outcomes (ELOs) for each qualification, ensuring that graduates possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and social responsibility to succeed in their chosen fields (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2016). In 2021, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Circular 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT, which introduced significant regulations regarding the workload of university programs, emphasizing the integration of practice and experimental hours alongside traditional lecturing hours (MOET, 2021). The circular also called for transformative changes in teaching methods, advocating for student-centered approaches that position learners as active participants in the educational process. These methods are designed to encourage student engagement and foster active participation in learning activities while being strategically oriented to help students achieve the learning outcomes of each module, component, and the overall training program. Additionally, the circular introduced regulations for student assessment, emphasizing alignment with expected learning outcomes and specifying levels of thinking to be demonstrated for each module and

program. Assessments must include both formative and summative approaches, serving as a basis for adjusting teaching and learning activities, promoting student effort, and supporting their progress. Moreover, assessment outcomes are intended to inform the continuous improvement of training programs and their implementation, ensuring the alignment of teaching practices with the evolving needs of students and the labor market (MOET, 2021). As can be seen, Circular 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT reflects a significant shift in pedagogical approaches within Vietnamese higher education, emphasizing student-centered learning, active participation, and alignment with clearly defined learning outcomes. The directive mandates that teaching methods position students as active participants in the educational process, focusing on practical application and problem-solving rather than rote memorization. This approach is highly congruent with the principles of service-learning, which combines experiential learning with community engagement to foster academic knowledge, skills, and social responsibility (Jacoby, 2014). Moreover, the circular's focus on formative and summative assessments to gauge student progress and inform teaching adjustments resonates with service-learning's reflective component. In service-learning, structured reflection connects academic content to community engagement, enabling students to evaluate their experiences and outcomes continuously (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). Thus, the pedagogical directives outlined in Circular 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT provide a strong foundation for the adoption and expansion of service-learning within Vietnamese universities, facilitating both academic rigor and civic engagement.

Benefits and challenges of implementing service learning in higher education

Service-learning is an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates community service with structured academic learning, fostering a dynamic connection between theory and practice. It is defined as a form of experiential education that combines meaningful community service with academic instruction and structured opportunities for reflection (Jacoby, 2014). This approach emphasizes reciprocal relationships between students, educators, and communities, ensuring that both academic and community goals are addressed (Furco, 1996). One of the core strengths of service-learning is its ability to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. By engaging in service activities that address real-world community needs, students have the opportunity to directly apply academic concepts in practical contexts. For instance, a student studying environmental science might participate in a local conservation project, where they can observe ecological

principles in action while contributing to environmental sustainability. This experiential process not only reinforces theoretical understanding but also demonstrates its relevance, making learning more engaging and meaningful (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Additionally, reflection is a critical component of service-learning, serving as the link between service experiences and deeper learning. Through structured reflection, students critically analyze their community engagement, connect it to course content, and explore its broader social and ethical implications (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). This reflective practice enhances intellectual and civic development, ensuring that service-learning is a transformative educational experience that integrates theory, practice, and personal growth.

Service-learning offers students a wide range of intellectual, personal, and social benefits, making it a transformative educational approach. Intellectually, it fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary integration by connecting theoretical knowledge with practical applications in real-world settings (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Gonzales, Harmon, & Fenn, 2020). This linkage not only deepens students' understanding of academic content but also equips them for future professional challenges by bridging classroom learning with practical experiences (Choi, Han, & Kim, 2023).On a moral and social level, service-learning promotes empathy, ethical reasoning, and an awareness of social inequalities, encouraging students to cultivate a sense of civic responsibility and personal accountability (Mtawa & Nkhoma, 2020; Meyers, 2009). These experiences further enhance leadership skills, teamwork, and communication, which are critical for both personal growth and professional success (Simons & Cleary, 2006; Hong et al., 2024). Reflection plays a pivotal role in this process, serving as the foundation for connecting community engagement with academic learning. Through reflection, students critically analyze their contributions, develop self-awareness, and gain a deeper understanding of societal issues (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997; Lau, 2021). Despite its numerous benefits, service-learning is not without challenges. Students often struggle to balance academic and service responsibilities, cope with emotional and intellectual complexities, and navigate unfamiliar community settings (Bahammam & Bahammam, 2023). To address these challenges and maximize the potential benefits, it is imperative to provide structured guidance, implement well-designed service-learning programs, and offer opportunities for meaningful reflection (Caspersz & Olaru, 2017; Meyers, 2009).

From lecturers's perspective, service-learning provides a transformative opportunity to enhance teaching practices and advance professional growth. By integrating community

engagement into their courses, educators can design dynamic, student-centered learning environments that prioritize active participation, critical thinking, and practical problem-solving (Salam et al., 2019). This pedagogical approach encourages innovation in curriculum development, project management, and collaboration with community partners, thereby expanding lecturers' teaching methodologies and fostering professional development (Behar-Horenstein et al., 2016). Reflection, a central component of service-learning, allows lecturers to critically evaluate their teaching strategies, measure the impact of their initiatives, and refine their practices based on feedback from students and community stakeholders (Meyers, 2009). Through this reflective process, lecturers can strengthen the connection between academic content and real-world societal issues, enriching the overall educational experience for students and themselves. However, service-learning presents challenges for lecturers. Barriers such as limited institutional support, increased workload, and the complexity of aligning service-learning activities with curricular goals and community needs can hinder its implementation (Salam et al., 2019). Furthermore, managing community partnerships and developing effective assessment frameworks for student learning outcomes require substantial time and expertise, often constrained by competing institutional demands. To maximize the potential of service-learning as an educational strategy, institutions must address these challenges by providing adequate resources, training, and support for lecturers.

For higher education institutions, service-learning represents a strategic approach to enhancing institutional reputation while aligning educational objectives with societal priorities. Through fostering meaningful community partnerships, service-learning strengthens the connections between institutions and local and global communities, advancing civic engagement and preparing students to become active, responsible citizens in an interconnected world (Salam et al., 2019; Behar-Horenstein et al., 2016). Furthermore, service-learning supports academic socialization by promoting collaborative learning environments and bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, thus enriching the educational experience for all stakeholders (Behar-Horenstein et al., 2016). On the other hand, effective implementation of service-learning faces significant challenges. These include securing sufficient funding, obtaining administrative support, and ensuring institutional recognition of service-learning's value as a pedagogical approach (Salam et al., 2019). To overcome these barriers, institutions must invest in professional development opportunities for lecturers, equipping them with the skills required to design, execute, and sustain impactful service-learning programs (Meyers, 2009). In addition, the establishment of

robust assessment frameworks is crucial to evaluate and scale service-learning initiatives effectively, ensuring their long-term sustainability and relevance. By addressing these challenges, higher education institutions can fully leverage the transformative potential of service-learning, advancing their mission to deliver academic excellence while fostering social responsibility and civic engagement.

In brief, service-learning emerges as a transformative pedagogical approach with profound implications for students, lecturers, and higher education institutions, particularly within the context of Vietnam's ongoing higher education reforms. For students, it bridges the gap between theory and practice, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic responsibility while equipping them with essential skills for the modern workforce. For lecturers, service-learning offers opportunities for professional growth, enabling them to innovate teaching practices, engage meaningfully with communities, and create dynamic, student-centered learning environments. For higher education institutions, it enhances institutional reputation, aligns educational goals with societal needs, and strengthens ties to local and global communities through meaningful partnerships. In the context of Vietnam, where higher education is undergoing significant innovation to meet the demands of a globalized economy, service-learning aligns seamlessly with national priorities for educational reform. Policies such as the Vietnamese Qualifications Framework (VQF) and Circular 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT underscore the importance of cultivating graduates with not only academic competence but also social responsibility and ethical awareness. Service-learning directly supports these objectives, providing a practical pathway to implement student-centered, experiential learning approaches that prepare graduates to address societal challenges.

Enabling and hindering factors affecting university lecturers' engagement in service learning

Lecturers play a pivotal role in the success of service-learning, as their engagement directly influences its design, implementation, and outcomes. Several enabling factors can facilitate lecturers' participation in service-learning. Experienced educators are more likely to embrace service-learning, as their expertise allows them to adapt lessons to student needs and manage the complexities of innovative methodologies (Bailey, 1996). Personal experience with service-learning further enhances lecturers' commitment, fostering an appreciation for its educational and societal benefits (Magelssen, 1997). Supportive leadership is another critical

factor, with school principals who integrate service-learning into school improvement plans significantly enhancing its adoption (Kinsley, 1997). Additionally, alignment between lecturers' perceptions of service-learning and its best practices contributes to successful implementation (Schine, 1997).

Converserly, there are also several hindering factors. For instance, pervasive pressures for test scores encourage rote memorization over independent thinking and creativity, making it difficult for educators to prioritize innovative practices like service-learning (Twombly, 2014). These challenges are compounded by inadequate professional development opportunities, which fail to equip lecturers with the necessary awareness and commitment to implement service-learning effectively (Greenberg et al., 2001). Moreover, the additional time required for tasks such as coordinating community partnerships and aligning activities with curricular goals often creates logistical burdens that deter engagement (Schine, 1997). Besides, a lack of support networks, particularly from management board, can discourage lecturers from integrating service-learning into their teaching practices (Wade et al.,1999). Resource limitations, including inadequate funding and access to materials, also hinder effective implementation (Wade et al., 1999).

In summary, the engagement of lecturers in service-learning is shaped by a balance of enabling and hindering factors. Addressing systemic barriers, such as resource constraints and insufficient support, while leveraging facilitators like teacher experience and leadership commitment, is essential to fostering broader adoption of service-learning and enhancing its impact in higher education.

Implementation of service learning in Vietnam

Service-learning in Vietnam has gained increasing recognition and implementation across various higher education institutions, aligning academic objectives with community service as mandated by national education policies. The Amended Law on Higher Education (2018) and Circular 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT emphasize community service as a core function of universities, alongside teaching and research. These policies have prompted universities to adopt service-learning as an experiential approach, enabling students to apply academic knowledge to real-world challenges, thereby fostering deeper understanding, practical skills, and civic responsibility (Nguyen, Milligan, & Nguyen, 2022). The implementation of service-learning varies across institutions, with notable examples including the Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) model at Đà Nẵng University of Architecture (DAU) and the

Service-Learning Center at Hoa Sen University (HSU). DAU introduced the CEL model in 2016 in select courses within the Architecture Department. By 2018, the establishment of the Community-Engaged Learning Center (CELC) provided structured support for designing and implementing CEL activities. Students at DAU engage in projects addressing urban planning and community development, honing teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills. Despite resource limitations and uneven adoption across faculties, CELC has mitigated these challenges through training, workshops, and partnerships with community organizations. Similarly, HSU has been a pioneer in service-learning since 2015, integrating it across disciplines such as education, health, and environmental studies. HSU's Service-Learning Center coordinates diverse activities, from short-term volunteer programs to long-term community-based research projects. These initiatives enhance students' practical skills and ethical awareness while contributing to community development. Addressing challenges such as diverse student needs and limited resources, HSU has adopted innovative approaches, including inter-departmental collaboration and strengthened partnerships with non-profit organizations. Other institutions, such as Thủ Dầu Một University and the University of Science under Vietnam National University, have integrated service-learning into specific disciplines, offering students experiential learning opportunities while addressing community needs. For instance, An Giang University collaborated with Hong Kong Polytechnic University on community-based projects, enhancing student learning and fostering social impact. As can be seen, service-learning in Vietnam is implemented through various models that cater to diverse educational and community engagement needs, reflecting a growing commitment to integrating academic learning with societal contributions. The first model, *service learning linked to a single course*, involves designing service-learning as a standalone course. These courses, which may be mandatory or elective, integrate community service into the curriculum as a significant assignment, such as a major project, midterm task, or final exam. This approach is often adopted by institutions with prior experience in embedding service-learning into their teaching practices, ensuring that community service aligns closely with academic objectives. The second model, *service learning across multiple courses*, connects one community service activity to two or three related courses within the same academic discipline. By integrating service-learning into a cluster of courses, this model encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and a more holistic approach to addressing community challenges, allowing students to apply and synthesize knowledge from different perspectives. The third model, service learning internships, offers a more intensive

experience, akin to independent research. This format is typically reserved for a select group of students with advanced knowledge, skills, and prior experience in community work. These internships enable students to deeply engage with community issues, conduct in-depth analyses, and propose innovative solutions, making it a highly impactful learning experience for both students and communities.

The diverse models of service-learning in Vietnam highlight its adaptability and effectiveness in addressing both educational and societal goals. Whether implemented as part of a single course, integrated across multiple disciplines, or delivered through specialized internships, service-learning enables students to bridge academic knowledge with real-world applications. This approach fosters critical thinking, civic responsibility, and ethical awareness, aligning with Vietnam's broader efforts to innovate higher education and strengthen connections between universities and their communities. Furthermore, these initiatives underscore the transformative potential of service-learning in Vietnamese higher education. Despite challenges such as limited funding and the need for robust assessment frameworks, structured models like those implemented at Đà Nẵng University of Architecture and Hoa Sen University demonstrate the capacity of service-learning to align academic objectives with societal needs. Scaling and sustaining such efforts can significantly enhance student learning outcomes, support professional development for lecturers, and contribute to community advancement. By fully integrating service-learning into their educational strategies, Vietnamese universities can cultivate well-rounded graduates prepared to address local and global challenges, advancing the nation's goals of innovation and social responsibility in higher education.

Research context

Hanoi University, the site of this research, is one of Vietnam's leading universities, renowned for its high-quality education and graduates with advanced expertise and foreign language proficiency. With a focus on preparing students for both domestic and international markets, the university offers 40 bachelor's programs, including 11 foreign language disciplines. Guided by its vision to become a reputable applied university specializing in language education, scientific research, and technology transfer, Hanoi University integrates initiatives like service-learning projects to align academic knowledge with real-world applications. These projects address community and societal needs while fostering students' professional skills and civic responsibilities.

The service-learning projects at Hanoi University involved two distinct initiatives, each tailored to specific academic modules and community needs. The first project, English for Tourism, was developed for students enrolled in a transnational education program who were taking a module of the same name. This module aimed to equip students with lexical resources and practical knowledge of English used in the tourism industry. Three lecturers collaborated to design a service-learning project where students applied their classroom learning to create promotional materials for a village in Hanoi identified as a potential tourist destination. Students worked in partnership with the local Youth and Women's Union to develop a brochure and promotional video, combining language skills with real-world marketing strategies. This project not only reinforced students' learning but also supported the village community's efforts to attract tourism and economic development. The second project was designed for students in the Russian Language Department as part of their Translation Practice module. Two lecturers created the project titled Russian Fairy Tales for Primary School Students. In this initiative, students were tasked with translating five Russian fairy tales into Vietnamese and subsequently performing them at local schools using puppets. The project was carried out in collaboration with five primary schools in Hanoi, fostering a connection between university students and young learners. This project allowed students to refine their translation skills while gaining hands-on experience in cross-cultural communication and community engagement. Both projects exemplified the integration of academic learning with meaningful community service, offering students an opportunity to apply their skills in authentic contexts while addressing local needs. These initiatives also strengthened partnerships between Hanoi University and community organizations, highlighting the transformative potential of service-learning in fostering civic responsibility and professional development among students.

Research participants

The research participants for this study comprised five lecturers (male and female, aged 25 to 35) from Hanoi University, specializing in Russian and English languages. These lecturers have taught at Hanoi University for a minimum of five years before participating in the service-learning project. Their involvement in the project was considered additional work, complementing their already substantial teaching loads as mandated by the university. In terms of educational backgrounds, most participants had pursued undergraduate or higher degrees, either domestically or abroad. Their international educational experiences are

assumed to have provided them with a broader perspective, equipping them with valuable insights into professional development and effective teaching practices. These experiences likely enhanced their ability to integrate innovative approaches, such as service-learning, into their teaching methodologies. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method, defined by Creswell (2018) as a process where participants are chosen based on their availability and willingness to contribute. This approach allowed for a swift and efficient recruitment process, ensuring that the study could proceed with motivated individuals who were familiar with the university's academic and operational environment. Their expertise and experiences enriched the research, offering valuable perspectives on the implementation and impact of service-learning in a higher education context.

Research method

Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for exploring the dynamics of teachers' engagement in service-learning, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of the enabling and hindering factors influencing their participation. This research approach provides an in-depth examination of the personal, institutional, and systemic elements that shape teachers' involvement in service-learning. Through semi-structured interviews, researchers can capture the complexities of teachers' experiences, including how professional development opportunities, institutional support, and personal motivations facilitate their engagement, as well as how challenges such as resource constraints, time pressures, and lack of administrative backing hinder their participation. Additionally, the qualitative approach also sheds light on potential strategies for improving teacher participation. Such finfings is essential for developing targeted interventions that enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of service-learning initiatives in higher education.

Data collection and analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to investigate teachers' engagement in service-learning, guided by a framework that addresses both enabling and hindering factors affecting their participation. Drawing from existing literature on service-learning implementation, the analysis focused on identifying themes related to professional development, personal experiences, institutional support, and resource availability. Data from in-depth interviews with lecturers were systematically coded to uncover key patterns and themes that reflect the dynamics of their engagement. This thematic approach provided a comprehensive

understanding of the interplay between facilitators and barriers, offering insights into strategies for enhancing teacher participation in service-learning.

Findings and discussions

Professional development and personal experiences

Analysis of the interview data highlighted professional development as a critical enabling factor for lecturers' engagement in service-learning. Participants consistently emphasized the impact of training workshops, mentoring, and collaborative learning opportunities on their ability to design and implement service-learning projects effectively. SL 1 noted, "The training session on designing community-based projects gave me practical tools and strategies to align service-learning activities with course objectives, which I had previously found challenging." Similarly, SL 2, who involved in the Russian fairly project note, "The workshop on experiential learning methods inspired me to design the project where students translated Russian fairy tales and performed them for primary school children. It gave me the tools to structure the activity in a way that enhanced both student learning and community impact." These underscore the importance of structured professional development in equipping educators with the confidence and skills required to adopt innovative pedagogical practices. Mentorship also emerged as a recurring theme, with participants expressing appreciation for the guidance provided by more experienced colleagues. SL 4 shared, "My mentor introduced me to frameworks for integrating community service into my teaching, which not only improved my course design but also inspired me to explore new ways of engaging students." Such experiences fostered a sense of empowerment and motivation among lecturers, enabling them to overcome initial apprehensions about implementing service-learning. Collaborative learning environments further enhanced professional development by facilitating knowledge exchange among peers. SL 2 said "Hearing how other lecturers cope with challenges in their service-learning projects helped me understand potential issues and prepare solutions for my own." This peer learning provided not only practical insights but also emotional support, fostering a culture of collective problem-solving and innovation. These findings demonstrate that professional development serves as a cornerstone for enabling lecturer engagement in service-learning. By offering targeted training, mentorship, and opportunities for collaboration, institutions can empower educators to adopt service-learning confidently and effectively. This aligns with broader efforts to

innovate higher education in Vietnam, where the focus is increasingly on fostering teaching excellence and community impact through innovative pedagogies.

Furthermore, personal experiences emerged as a critical factor influencing lecturers' engagement in service-learning, acting both as a source of motivation and as a potential barrier. Positive experiences, particularly those tied to professional growth and student success, often enabled lecturers to embrace service-learning with confidence. SL 4 shared, "When I saw my students use their language skills to create a tourism brochure that was praised by the community, it reminded me why I love teaching." This positive perspective was also experienced by SL 1, who involved in the Russian fairy tales translation project. SL 1 reflected, "Seeing my students translate complex Russian fairy tales and bring them to life through puppet shows for primary school children was incredibly rewarding. Watching the children engage with the stories and hearing their laughter reminded me of the transformative power of teaching." These moments of success not only highlighted the students' ability to apply their language skills in meaningful ways but also reinforced the lecturer's belief in the impact of their teaching. Such experiences demonstrate how tangible achievements in service-learning projects can affirm lecturers' professional purpose and inspire continued innovation in their teaching practices.

However, personal experiences also highlighted hindering factors. Lecturers with limited prior exposure to service-learning often expressed uncertainty about how to design and implement such projects. SL 4 admitted, "I had never done service-learning before, and I wasn't sure how to balance community needs with academic goals." This lack of familiarity, coupled with apprehensions about managing student participation and outcomes, created a sense of hesitation. Furthermore, lecturers who had experienced poorly supported initiatives were less likely to view service-learning as a viable teaching method. SL 5 shared, "In the past, I tried a project without much guidance, and it was overwhelming. That experience made me cautious about trying again."

As can be seen, the collected data illustrated that the dual role of personal experiences in shaping lecturers' engagement in service-learning. Positive experiences, whether through professional achievements or structured development opportunities, empower lecturers to explore innovative teaching methods. On the other hand, a lack of prior exposure or negative experiences can create barriers, highlighting the need for institutional support and targeted training to build lecturers' confidence and capacity. These findings align with Vietnam's broader educational reforms, which emphasize the importance of equipping faculty with the

skills and experiences needed to meet global standards. By fostering environments that prioritize both positive experiences and ongoing professional development, higher education institutions can enable lecturers to engage more effectively in service-learning, contributing to the nation's goals of educational innovation and societal impact.

Institutional support and resource availability

Institutional support emerged as a crucial factor influencing lecturers' engagement in service-learning, with both enabling and hindering dimensions. Participants highlighted how constructive feedback, recognition, and access to resources significantly boosted their confidence and motivation to implement service-learning. SL 3 participant noted, "When the dean praised my initiative in designing a service-learning project, it validated my efforts and encouraged me to explore more innovative methods." Similarly, SL 5 shared, "Access to funding and institutional partnerships made it possible to collaborate with community organizations, which was essential for the success of my project." These examples underscore the importance of institutional acknowledgment and tangible support in enabling effective service-learning practices.

However, participants also identified institutional barriers that hindered their engagement. A lack of consistent administrative support and unclear policies were frequently mentioned as obstacles. SL 4 reported "Sometimes, it feels like service-learning is something that happen out of nowhere, with no clear guidelines or structured support from the administration." Additionally, resource constraints, such as limited funding was cited as significant challenges. As SL 1 noted, "We often have great ideas for service-learning projects, but without proper funding and logistical support, it's hard to start them.". Additionally, a lack of leadership support can be seen as a constraint. As SL 2 stated, "Without explicit support from the administration, it's challenging to prioritize service-learning alongside other academic responsibilities."

These findings highlight the dual role of institutional support in either facilitating or hindering lecturers' engagement in service-learning. Positive feedback, access to resources, and supportive leadership are powerful enablers, while inconsistent policies and resource limitations serve as barriers. Therefore, it can be said that strengthening institutional frameworks to provide clear policies, adequate resources, and leadership commitment is essential for fostering a culture of service-learning in higher education. Such measures are particularly important in contexts like Vietnam, where higher education institutions are

increasingly adopting internationalized practices and striving to align with global educational standards.

Conclusion

In conclusion, service-learning represents a vital factor for transforming higher education in Vietnam, aligning academic programs with the nation's broader goals of fostering innovation, social responsibility, and global competitiveness. By bridging academic knowledge with real-world applications, service-learning not only enhances student learning outcomes but also strengthens university-community partnerships, positioning Vietnamese higher education as a driver of societal progress. This approach is particularly significant as Vietnam continues its efforts to modernize its higher education system to meet international standards. As lecturers play a central role in the implementation of service-learning, their engagement directly influences the design, implementation, and outcomes of these initiatives. Their commitment to integrating service-learning into curricula reflects their capacity to inspire students, promote civic responsibility, and contribute to meaningful community development. However, challenges such as limited resources, and insufficient professional development opportunities often hinder their ability to fully engage in service-learning. Recognizing and addressing these barriers is essential to leveraging the transformative potential of this pedagogical approach. Therefore, to support lecturers and expand the implementation of service-learning across Vietnam, universities must prioritize institutional support by providing clear policies, adequate funding, and robust professional development programs. Structured mentorship, collaborative networks, and leadership recognition of service-learning's value can further empower lecturers to embrace and sustain these initiatives. Additionally, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration within universities will create an enabling environment for service-learning to thrive. By investing in these measures, Vietnamese higher education can ensure the widespread adoption of service-learning, ultimately enriching academic excellence and contributing to the nation's socio-economic development.

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