

Original Research Article

Improving the Quality of Human Resources at Private Universities in the Mekong Delta – Vietnam

Luong Ngoc Bich^{1,2*} 

¹PhD Student, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

²Lecturer, Cuu Long University, Vinh Long Province, Vietnam

***Corresponding Author:** Luong Ngoc Bich

PhD Student, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract: The quality of human resources at private universities in the Mekong Delta is pivotal to the region's socio-economic development and the success of its higher education system. Despite notable growth, these institutions face underqualified faculty, limited professional development, and insufficient industry partnerships, which hinder their ability to meet the demands of a competitive job market. This paper adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques to explore the key issues affecting human resource quality at private universities. Through surveys and interviews with faculty members, administrators, and industry stakeholders, the study gathers insights into current challenges and potential areas for improvement. Additionally, the research analyzes secondary data from policy documents, institutional reports, and case studies of successful models from other regions and countries. The findings emphasize the necessity of comprehensive faculty development programs, including ongoing professional training, research opportunities, and competitive compensation to attract and retain qualified educators. The study also underscores the importance of aligning academic programs with industry needs through enhanced collaboration between universities and businesses. Furthermore, government support in the form of policy reforms, funding, and quality assurance measures is deemed essential to create parity between public and private institutions. Moreover, the research highlights the need for digital transformation at private universities to address the rising demand for online and hybrid learning models. By leveraging a robust methodological framework, this research provides actionable strategies for private universities in the Mekong Delta to strengthen their human resource capabilities and produce a skilled workforce that supports regional and national development.

Keywords: Human resources, private universities, Mekong Delta area.

INTRODUCTION

The Mekong Delta has 13 provincial-level administrative units, including 01 centrally-run city, Can Tho city, and 12 provinces, including Long An, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Hau Giang, Soc Trang, Dong Thap, An Giang, Kien Giang, Bac Lieu and Ca Mau; the total area of the region is 39,194.6 km² and the total population is 17,300,947 people¹, accounting for 11.8% of the area and 17.6% of the population of the country. The region's economic growth rate before the COVID-19 pandemic was higher than the whole country (the period 2015-2019 reached over 7%, 0.2% higher than the economic growth rate of the entire country). The Mekong Delta is the country's largest rice, rice and seafood production region (General Statistics Office, 2021). The Mekong Delta region plays a crucial role in Vietnam's socio-economic development, particularly in agriculture, fisheries, and tourism. However, to fully harness its potential and address emerging challenges such as climate change, industrialization, and globalization, the region must significantly improve the quality of its human resources. Private universities in the Mekong Delta are integral to this endeavor, serving as key institutions for higher education and workforce development (Prime Minister, 2011; Ministry of Education & Training, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2011).

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Despite their growing presence and contributions, private universities in this region face numerous challenges in terms of educational quality, resource allocation, and competitiveness compared to public universities (Pham, 2023). The quality of human resources – both in terms of academic staff and graduates – remains a critical issue that directly impacts the universities' ability to meet the demands of the labor market and foster sustainable development in the region.

This paper explores the current state of human resources at private universities in the Mekong Delta, identifying key factors that hinder their effectiveness, such as limited financial resources, inadequate faculty qualifications, and outdated curriculum structures. Furthermore, the paper proposes strategic solutions for improving the quality of human resources, including enhancing faculty training, revising academic programs, and fostering stronger partnerships with industries.

By addressing these issues, private universities in the Mekong Delta can not only improve their academic standing but also contribute to the long-term socio-economic advancement of the region, preparing a skilled workforce capable of driving innovation and competitiveness in a rapidly changing world.

PURPOSE AND METHODS

Purpose: is to examine the current challenges and limitations faced by private universities in the Mekong Delta in terms of human resource development. It aims to analyze factors influencing the quality of academic staff and graduates, and to propose strategic solutions to enhance human resource quality. The ultimate goal is to help these universities produce a more skilled and competitive workforce, which can contribute to the sustainable socio-economic development of the Mekong Delta region.

Methodology: The paper employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The methodology includes:

Literature review: A review of existing studies and reports on human resource challenges and higher education development in the Mekong Delta and globally, focusing on private universities.

Survey and Interviews: A survey conducted with faculty members, administrative staff, and students from several private universities in the region, aiming to gather insights on perceptions of education quality, challenges faced, and suggestions for improvement. In-depth interviews were also conducted with university administrators and industry representatives to explore the alignment between academic programs and labor market demands.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data from the surveys were statistically analyzed to identify trends and correlations. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended survey responses were categorized to extract key themes and insights.

Main Results: The main findings of the paper are to identify the challenges that private universities in the Mekong Delta face as follows:

First, limited faculty expertise: Many private universities in the Mekong Delta struggle with recruiting and retaining highly qualified faculty members, which affects the quality of education.

Second, outdated curriculum: Academic programs often do not align well with current industry needs, leading to a skills gap in graduates.

Third, lack of resources: Private universities have fewer financial and technological resources compared to public institutions, limiting their ability to invest in faculty development and infrastructure.

Forth, weak industry-academia links: There is insufficient collaboration between private universities and local industries, which reduces the practical relevance of academic programs.

To implement the research content, the author needs to clearly define the scope by focusing on the specific challenges of human resource development at private universities in the Mekong Delta, including faculty expertise, curriculum relevance, resource allocation, and industry collaboration. A thorough literature review of domestic and international studies should identify gaps and relevant frameworks to guide the research. The author should employ a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys of faculty, students, and administrators to gather quantitative insights, along with in-depth interviews with university leaders and industry representatives to explore practical solutions. Data should be analyzed using statistical tools and qualitative thematic analysis to identify key patterns and correlations. Based on the findings, the author needs to propose actionable recommendations, such as strategies for faculty recruitment and development, curriculum reforms aligned with industry demands, and enhanced university-industry partnerships. The study should also address policy implications, advocating for government support in funding, quality assurance, and equitable growth between public and private institutions. Lastly, the author should outline a roadmap for implementing solutions and metrics to evaluate their effectiveness in improving human resource quality over time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of improving human resource quality at private universities in the Mekong Delta is deeply intertwined with the broader discourse on higher education development, both in Vietnam and globally. Key issues relevant to this research include the challenges private universities face in aligning human resource development with regional socio-economic demands, the role of educational quality enhancement in achieving institutional goals, and the adoption of innovative management practices.

This study builds on existing literature on educational quality, human resource management, and the strategic role of private universities in driving regional development. By synthesizing Vietnamese and international perspectives, the research identifies gaps in applying global best practices within the context of private universities in the Mekong Delta. It also highlights the need for tailored strategies for the region's unique socio-economic and cultural characteristics.

The theoretical framework for this research draws from established concepts of human capital development, quality assurance in higher education, and institutional leadership. This provides a foundation for the subsequent analysis, which aims to propose practical and sustainable solutions to enhance the quality of human resources at private universities in the Mekong Delta.

Overview of Research in Vietnam

Firstly, Research on Human Resources and Human Resource Development

Developing human resources, especially high-quality human resources, is considered one of the most fundamental solutions for socio-economic development. Recognizing that importance, many studies have been conducted to study, analyze, evaluate and propose many important solutions to develop human resources, especially high-quality human resources, to meet the requirements of comprehensive social development. Some typical studies include the following:

Phung The Tuan, *et al.*, (2022), in "Developing High-Quality Human Resources in the Field of Education and Training: Policies, Legal Provisions and Recommendations for Some Solutions" affirmed: "In each stage of national construction and development, it is necessary to have human resources, especially high-quality human resources compatible, to meet the requirements and tasks of that period. This requires the State to have the right attitude, perspective, and way of dealing with training, fostering, building, using, and taking advantage of high-quality human resources in line with the goals and tasks of the current era". In order to improve the quality of human resource training to meet the requirements of industrialization, modernization, and international integration, the Government of Vietnam wishes to attract and always encourage and create favorable conditions for investors. domestic and foreign investment in education and training development at all levels and training levels (Government, 2017 & 2021). In this sense, human resources are equivalent to labor resources or social human resources. That is a part of the population of working age who are able to work. Human resources are studied in terms of quantity and quality (Tuan, *et al.*, 2023).

Statements of policy and direction affirm: universities must be centers of science and technology research, technology transfer, and application in production and life; implement close linkages between enterprises, employers, training institutions, and the State to develop human resources according to social needs; consider enterprises as the center of application innovation and technology transfer, the most important source of demand of the science and technology market (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). Bui Thi Thu Hien (2023) in "Training high-quality human resources: from the perspective of development policy and strategy" pointed out: "High-quality human resources have an important position and role in the process of building and developing the country; at the same time, the State's policy is the driving force for comprehensive development of human resources; in which education must be considered the top national policy".

Secondly, Regarding the Human Resources at Universities in Vietnam

The Vietnam education system has undergone significant reforms over the past few decades, particularly in response to the country's economic liberalization and global integration. Many Vietnamese studies focus on the quality of higher education, examining the role of both public and private universities in providing a workforce that meets the needs of the country's growing economy. Vietnam is one of the countries that actively and proactively integrates internationally because it sees the objectivity of this process in the development of humanity. Therefore, after emerging from the socio-economic crisis (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016 & 2021), Vietnam has gradually shifted from international economic integration to deep and comprehensive international integration in all fields (Trung, *et al.*, 2020a & 2020b). To have "global citizens" who are competitive enough in the world human resources market, it is necessary to innovate higher education in the direction of both maintaining the unique features of domestic higher education and approaching the common standards of world higher education. Thus, Vietnam's internal development needs require higher education to have a strong "transformation. Phung The Tuan, *et al.*, (2022) pointed out that the State's policies and laws play an important role in determining the success of international cooperation in higher education. Many State policies have been issued to create a legal corridor for international cooperation in the field of higher education (Duhiep *et al.*, 2022). Analyzing the current state of policies; achievements along with remaining shortcomings and difficulties will contribute to perfecting policies

and promoting the internationalization of higher education in the context of universities being given more autonomy in the future.

In the context of human resource challenges at universities in Vietnam, significant reforms in higher education have been implemented to align with the country's economic liberalization and global integration. However, private universities, particularly in the Mekong Delta, continue to face notable obstacles that require targeted solutions. Nguyen Van Phuc (2017), in his work "Quality of higher education and challenges in human resource development" underscores the critical need for curriculum reform to align academic programs with labor market demands, a deficiency especially pronounced in private institutions with limited resources. Pham Thi Hong Ha (2015) in "Current situation and solutions for human resource development at private universities in Vietnam" identifies financial constraints and the difficulty of attracting qualified academic staff as major issues for private universities, advocating for stronger public-private partnerships to enhance faculty quality and infrastructure. Tran Thi Thanh Thuy (2018) in "Human resource development at private universities in Vietnam in the context of integration" extends this discussion by addressing the pressures of globalization and rapid technological advancements, emphasizing the importance of continuous professional development and fostering international collaboration to improve teaching quality. These studies collectively provide a foundation for the current research by highlighting gaps in faculty expertise, curriculum alignment, and resource allocation, which the author seeks to address through comprehensive strategies tailored to the unique challenges of private universities in the Mekong Delta.

Thirtly, Regarding Human Resource Development in the Mekong Delta

Human resource development in the Mekong Delta faces significant challenges that necessitate targeted intervention, particularly in private universities. Le Quang Minh (2019), in his study "*Human resource development in the Mekong Delta: The role of universities*" emphasizes the critical importance of skilled human resources for addressing the region's socio-economic challenges. However, private universities often fall short due to constraints such as limited resources, insufficiently qualified faculty, and outdated curricula. Building on this, Nguyen Thi Hong (2020) in "*Solutions to improve human resource quality at private universities in the Mekong Delta*" identifies key areas for improvement, including enhancing faculty qualifications, modernizing curricula, and fostering stronger partnerships with local industries. These insights highlight persistent gaps in faculty expertise, curriculum relevance, and university-industry collaboration, forming a theoretical basis for the current research. The study aims to build on these findings by proposing comprehensive strategies to address these issues, thereby improving the quality of education and human resource development in private universities within the Mekong Delta.

International Literature Reviews

Firtly, Regarding Private Higher Education and Human Resource Development

Private universities around the world have played an increasing role in providing higher education, especially in countries where public institutions are overburdened. However, the quality of education at private institutions often varies, with challenges similar to those faced by private universities in the Mekong Delta.

The global perspective on private higher education reveals recurring challenges that align closely with the issues faced by private universities in the Mekong Delta. Altbach (2010), in "The rise of private higher education: Trends and Implications" underscores that private universities often bridge gaps in higher education access but struggle to maintain academic quality. His emphasis on enhancing teaching quality, investing in research, and strengthening academic-industry collaboration provides valuable insights for addressing similar challenges in the Mekong Delta. Similarly, Varghese (2006), in "Growth and expansion of private higher education in Africa" highlights financial constraints as a significant barrier to improving faculty development and infrastructure. The study calls for robust governance systems and innovative funding mechanisms, offering potential strategies for improving resource allocation and institutional management in the region's private universities. These findings form an essential theoretical foundation, guiding the current research to propose actionable solutions that enhance faculty qualifications, academic relevance, and resource efficiency within the context of private universities in the Mekong Delta.

Seconly, Regarding the Human Resource Development in Higher Education

The theoretical foundation for addressing human resource development at private universities, particularly in the Mekong Delta, can draw from key international research insights. Schultz (1961), in his seminal work "*Investment in human capital*" establishes that education and training are critical for economic development. This principle underscores the need for strategic investments in faculty training and curriculum development to enhance the quality of education in the region. Teichler (2009), in "*Higher education and the world of work: conceptual frameworks, comparative perspectives, empirical findings*" emphasizes aligning academic programs with labor market needs, a critical challenge for private universities in the Mekong Delta as they strive to produce a workforce equipped for regional socio-economic demands. Knight (2013), in "*Cross-border higher education: Issues and Trends*" highlights the role of international collaboration in improving education quality, suggesting that partnerships with global institutions can address resource

constraints, enhance faculty qualifications, and modernize curricula. These frameworks collectively provide a basis for the current research to propose practical, context-specific strategies for human resource development that leverage international best practices while addressing local challenges.

RESULTS

Overview of Education at Private Universities in the Mekong Delta

The Mekong Delta region has experienced a robust expansion of higher education, especially private universities, in recent years. This growth has addressed the region's increasing demand for education and created more opportunities for students.

Growth in the Number of Private Universities:

Several private universities in the Mekong Delta have been established, attracting a growing number of students due to the increasing demand for education in the region. These institutions play a crucial role in providing higher education to an area with high population density and significant labor demand.

Training Quality Focused on Local Needs:

Private universities in the Mekong Delta emphasize training in fields aligned with the local economy and workforce demands, such as agriculture, aquaculture, food technology, tourism, and hospitality management. This approach helps students learn and practice skills in high-demand local industries. Universities also strive to design more practical curricula tailored to local conditions and the needs of regional businesses.

Shortage of High-Quality Faculty:

Despite efforts to improve teaching quality, private universities face challenges in attracting well-qualified and experienced faculty members. Many lecturers do not meet international standards and lack opportunities to participate in large research projects or advanced training programs. The proportion of faculty with high academic qualifications, such as doctoral degrees and professorships, remains low, affecting the quality of education and the universities' reputation.

Limited Infrastructure and Equipment:

Many private universities in the Mekong Delta struggle to invest in modern infrastructure and equipment to support teaching and research. This shortfall reduces educational quality and impacts students' learning experiences. Although some universities have made efforts to improve facilities, they are still unable to compete with large public universities in urban areas.

Collaboration with Businesses and Practical Orientation:

To enhance educational quality, many universities have strengthened partnerships with local businesses to provide students with practical training opportunities and better job prospects after graduation. However, these collaborations are still unevenly developed and require further strengthening to achieve higher effectiveness.

Integration Efforts and Improved Learning Environment:

Some universities have begun adopting digital technologies and modern teaching methods to keep up with educational trends, such as online teaching, interactive classrooms, and technology-driven training management. Institutions also organize extracurricular activities, workshops, and soft skills development programs to foster well-rounded student development.

Financial Challenges and Operating Costs:

Private universities in the Mekong Delta primarily rely on tuition fees for operations. When facing financial difficulties, they often struggle to invest in improving teaching quality and infrastructure. Tuition hikes may provide a short-term solution but can limit local students' access to higher education.

Current Status of Human Resource Quality at Private Universities in the Mekong Delta

Achievements and Their Causes:

Despite many challenges, private universities in the Mekong Delta have achieved some remarkable achievements in improving the quality of human resources, specifically as follows:

Diversification of Training Programs:

Universities have proactively updated their curricula to meet labor market demands. Many programs are linked with businesses, offering students internship and work opportunities during their studies. Some institutions prioritize training in fields that meet the local labor needs, such as agriculture, aquaculture, tourism, and information technology. Private universities can adapt more quickly than public ones, tailoring programs to meet regional economic and labor market needs.

Improved Teaching Quality:

Faculty members increasingly enhance their professional qualifications through training and development activities. The integration of information technology into training management and teaching has improved education delivery, fostering better learning experiences for students. Competition among universities has driven private institutions to continuously improve their training quality to attract students and strengthen their academic reputation.

Promotion of Scientific Research and Extracurricular Activities:

Many universities actively encourage scientific research, enabling faculty and students to participate in research projects at the institutional, provincial, and national levels. Private universities also focus on regularly organizing extracurricular activities to help students enhance their soft skills, improve communication, and strengthen teamwork abilities.

Development of Student Entrepreneurship Programs:

Numerous private universities in the Mekong Delta have established entrepreneurship programs and clubs to support students in developing entrepreneurial skills, fostering their confidence and creativity post-graduation.

Enhancing International Collaboration:

Most universities have established partnerships with international universities and businesses, allowing students and faculty to participate in exchange programs, study, research, and internships abroad. These partnerships also contribute financial resources (e.g., scholarships), infrastructure, and internship opportunities to improve training quality.

Limitations and Their Causes:

Limited faculty qualifications and expertise:

One of the key findings is that many private universities in the Mekong Delta are facing challenges in attracting and retaining highly qualified faculty members. A significant proportion of the teaching staff at these institutions lack advanced degrees and sufficient teaching experience, which negatively impacts the overall quality of education. The reasons include (i) Financial limitations, specifically the inability to offer competitive salaries to attract talent; (ii) Geographic challenges, as many highly qualified individuals prefer to work in major cities like Ho Chi Minh City, where there are more opportunities; and (iii) Insufficient faculty development programs, which are essential for improving teaching and research capabilities.

Outdated curricula and teaching methods:

Research indicates that the curricula at many private universities are outdated and not aligned with current labor market demands. Common issues include (i) A lack of integration of new technologies and specialized skills, which are crucial for students to compete in the evolving job market; (ii) Insufficient focus on soft skills such as critical thinking, communication, and teamwork, which employers increasingly value; and (iii) Inadequate connection between academic content and practical applications, resulting in a gap between what students learn and what employers need.

Weak alignment with industry production requirements:

Another significant finding is the lack of close collaboration between private universities and local industries. This weak linkage leads to (i) Limited internship opportunities for students, reducing their practical experience before entering the workforce; (ii) Minimal involvement of industry professionals in curriculum design and academic advisory roles; and (iii) A disconnect between academic research and real-world industry challenges, meaning research outputs often fail to meet local business needs.

Resource constraints:

Private universities in the Mekong Delta often face significant resource constraints compared to public universities, particularly in terms of funding, infrastructure, and technology. These limitations affect both faculty performance and student outcomes in the following ways (i) Restricted access to modern educational infrastructure such as laboratories, libraries, and research facilities, hindering learning experiences and limiting research opportunities; (ii) Insufficient investment in digital learning platforms and online education tools, which have become increasingly essential, especially post-COVID-19; and (iii) A lack of scholarships or financial aid programs, which could attract talented students who might otherwise choose public or international universities.

Geographical and socioeconomic factors:

The geographical and socioeconomic characteristics of the Mekong Delta pose unique challenges, such as (i) Urban-rural disparities that affect the ability of universities to attract and retain students, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; (ii) Financial and logistical challenges faced by rural students, limiting their ability to pursue higher education, particularly at private institutions with higher tuition fees; and (iii) The region's

economic focus on agriculture and aquaculture limits the demand for graduates in high-tech and service industries, making it difficult for universities to expand academic programs into new fields.

The need for policy support and Public-Private partnerships:

The findings highlight the lack of government support and public-private partnerships, which could help private universities address their challenges. Opportunities for collaboration between public organizations, private universities, and local governments could be better leveraged to (i) Provide financial and infrastructural support for faculty development and student learning; (ii) Encourage resource sharing between public and private institutions in the region; and (iii) Implement policies that incentivize private universities to align their academic programs with regional and national development goals.

Recommendations and Strategic Solutions

To enhance the quality of human resources at private universities in the Mekong Delta, a set of strategic recommendations and solutions should be implemented. The aim is to create a sustainable system that supports the continuous growth and improvement of private universities, ensuring they meet the socioeconomic demands of the region.

Faculty development and retention

Provide comprehensive faculty development programs focused on improving teaching quality, research capacity and professional skills.

Continuous professional development - CPD: Implement CPD initiatives that offer ongoing training through workshops, symposiums, and certification courses. These programs should focus on modern teaching methods, digital tools, and innovative pedagogies.

Scholarships and advanced training: Provide scholarships and financial support for faculty to pursue advanced degrees (Master's and Ph.D.) and international training opportunities. Partnerships with international universities and funding from government agencies can facilitate this.

Improved compensation and benefits: Offer competitive salaries, research grants, and benefits such as housing allowances or healthcare to attract and retain qualified faculty.

Faculty exchange programs: Establish exchange programs with domestic and international universities to promote knowledge sharing, exposure to global best practices, and professional growth.

Curriculum reform and industry alignment

Regularly updating the curriculum to align with changing industry needs, ensuring graduates are equipped with the right skills for the modern job market.

Academia-Industry partnerships: Engage industry professionals in co-developing curricula tailored to practical needs. Establish industry advisory boards to guide curriculum development and ensure academic programs remain relevant.

Integration of practical skills: Embed practical skills and hands-on training into the curriculum, including internships, work-based learning, and case studies. Collaborate with local businesses to provide real-world experience for students.

Soft skills training: Incorporate soft skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving into academic programs. These are highly valued by employers and improve graduate employability.

Review of outdated programs: Regularly assess academic programs to identify outdated courses and replace them with relevant subjects, such as data science, renewable energy, and tourism management, to meet regional and global demands.

Strengthening Industry Collaboration

Promote closer partnerships between private universities and local industries to enhance research, student employability and faculty expertise.

Internship and Co-op programs: Develop structured internship and co-op programs to give students hands-on experience in relevant industries. Partnering with businesses can equip students with practical skills and enhance employability.

Industry-relevant learning: Introduce lectures, workshops, and mentoring sessions led by industry experts. This exposure provides students and faculty with practical insights.

Joint research projects: Collaborate with local industries on research projects addressing regional challenges such as climate change, sustainable agriculture, and economic development. Industry-funded initiatives can also secure additional resources for universities.

Job fairs and recruitment events: Organize job fairs and recruitment drives in collaboration with local businesses to connect graduates with potential employers, ensuring smoother transitions from education to employment.

Mobilizing resources and improving infrastructure

Mobilize resources to improve infrastructure, digital tools and research capacity at private universities.

Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs: Establish PPPs to secure funding for upgrading university facilities such as laboratories, libraries, and research centers. Businesses can co-invest in infrastructure development in exchange for access to skilled graduates or research outcomes.

Government grants and subsidies: Advocate for increased government support through grants, subsidies, and tax incentives to improve university infrastructure. Funding should also cover faculty training, student scholarships, and access to digital tools.

Modern digital learning platforms: Invest in advanced digital learning platforms to support online and hybrid education. Ensure accessibility for rural students with limited internet by providing affordable or subsidized data packages.

International funding and collaboration: Seek funding from international organizations, NGOs, and foreign universities to enhance infrastructure and research capabilities. Collaborative projects on global issues like climate change and sustainable development can attract international investments.

Expanding access for rural and low-income students

Promoting inclusivity and social mobility through better access to education for disadvantaged and rural students is essential.

Scholarship programs: Establish targeted scholarship and financial aid programs for students from low-income families and rural areas. Funding can come from university resources, business partnerships, or government agencies.

Flexible learning options: Develop flexible learning options, including online courses and distance education programs, to support students unable to attend classes regularly due to financial or geographical constraints.

Outreach and awareness programs: Implement outreach initiatives in rural areas to raise awareness about educational opportunities, scholarships, and financial aid. Partner with schools and local communities to encourage students to pursue higher education.

Pre-University preparation programs: Offer pre-university courses to help disadvantaged students build academic and soft skills needed for success in higher education.

Enhancing Research and Innovation Capacity

Promoting research and innovation at private universities by improving access to funding, resources, and collaborative opportunities is crucial for regional development.

Research grants and scholarships: Secure research funding from government agencies, NGOs, and private industries to support faculty and student projects. Universities should also establish internal grant programs to encourage small-scale research initiatives.

Collaborative research networks: Join or establish research networks with national and international universities to share knowledge, resources, and research opportunities. These collaborations can lead to joint publications and enhance visibility.

Focus on regional issues: Encourage research addressing specific challenges of the Mekong Delta, such as water management, sustainable agriculture, and environmental conservation. This focus can attract funding from both public and private sectors committed to regional development.

Dedicated research time for faculty: Allocate specific time and resources for faculty to engage in research activities, including sabbaticals or reduced teaching loads, enabling them to focus on research and publications.

Government Support and Policy Reforms

Strong government involvement through policy reforms, funding, and quality assurance mechanisms is vital for the sustainability of private universities.

Increased government funding: Advocate for greater government investment in private universities, especially in infrastructure development, faculty training, and research funding. Financial incentives like tax breaks or matching grants for industry-university partnerships should be introduced.

Policy reforms for autonomy: Push for policy reforms granting private universities more autonomy in academic and financial decision-making. This will enable them to respond quickly to changing market demands and improve governance structures.

National quality assurance and accreditation: Establish national accreditation standards applicable to both public and private universities. This ensures that private universities meet high standards and can compete on equal footing with public institutions.

DISCUSSIONS

Improving the quality of human resources at private universities in the Mekong Delta is a pivotal endeavor that requires a multifaceted and strategic approach. The challenges these institutions face, such as limited faculty expertise, outdated curricula, insufficient collaboration with industries, and resource constraints, necessitate targeted and sustainable solutions to elevate their academic and operational standards:

Firstly, faculty development must be prioritized through comprehensive training programs, competitive compensation packages, and opportunities for academic research and professional growth. Enhancing faculty qualifications not only improves teaching quality but also fosters innovation and thought leadership, which are critical for academic excellence. Curriculum reform is equally essential, with an emphasis on aligning educational programs with the demands

of the labor market. Regularly updating course content to reflect industry trends and integrating practical skills training can bridge the gap between academia and employment.

Secondly, fostering robust partnerships between universities and industries is key to creating a pipeline of skilled graduates who are ready to contribute to the workforce. Collaborative initiatives such as internships, joint research projects, and advisory boards with industry experts can ensure that academic programs remain relevant and responsive to real-world challenges. Strengthening these ties will also open doors for additional funding and resource sharing, benefiting both students and faculty.

Resource mobilization remains a pressing concern for private universities in the region. Diversifying funding sources through public-private partnerships, international collaborations, and philanthropic support can provide the financial stability needed to invest in infrastructure, faculty development, and technology. Moreover, embracing digital transformation, particularly in the wake of increasing demand for online and hybrid learning models, will enable these institutions to expand access to quality education, especially for students in remote and disadvantaged areas.

Government support is critical to leveling the playing field between public and private universities. Policies that provide financial aid, tax incentives, and regulatory frameworks to support private institutions can create an enabling environment for growth. Additionally, implementing robust quality assurance mechanisms will ensure that private universities meet national and international standards.

Finally, improving access for disadvantaged students must remain a cornerstone of human resource development efforts. Expanding scholarship programs, offering flexible payment plans, and creating inclusive learning environments will enable more students to benefit from higher education and contribute to the socio-economic development of the Mekong Delta.

CONCLUSION

From the author's perspective, enhancing human resource quality is not only a response to immediate challenges but also a strategic investment in the future of the Mekong Delta. Faculty development should go beyond basic training and include opportunities for international collaboration, advanced research, and professional growth. Such initiatives can elevate the academic standing of private universities and improve their ability to attract and retain talented educators. Similarly, curriculum reform must be dynamic and regularly updated to align with industry trends, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for the evolving job market. The author also emphasizes the importance of fostering robust partnerships between universities and local industries. These collaborations can provide students with practical training opportunities, facilitate knowledge transfer, and enhance the practical relevance of academic programs. Additionally, addressing resource limitations through innovative funding models, such as public-private partnerships and philanthropic contributions, is critical for enabling private universities to invest in infrastructure, digital tools, and state-of-the-art learning environments.

Moreover, the author highlights the necessity of embracing digital transformation. As online and hybrid learning models become increasingly prevalent, private universities must invest in modern technological infrastructure and training programs for educators and students alike. Such measures will not only expand access to education for rural and low-income students but also prepare institutions to adapt to future educational demands. Finally, the author advocates for greater government support in terms of policy reforms, funding, and quality assurance mechanisms. Leveling the playing field between public and private universities is essential for ensuring equity in higher education and maximizing the potential of private institutions to contribute to national development. The author concludes that by implementing these strategic solutions, private universities in the Mekong Delta can transform themselves into key drivers of regional progress and innovation, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and prosperous society. In conclusion, the path to improving the quality of human resources at private universities in the Mekong Delta lies in a holistic strategy that integrates faculty development, curriculum reform, industry collaboration, resource mobilization, and government support. By addressing these critical areas, private universities can become catalysts for regional growth, producing a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of meeting the challenges of a dynamic global economy. The success of this endeavor will not only uplift the institutions themselves but also contribute significantly to the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta and Vietnam as a whole.

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