

**POLICIES ON UNIVERSITY TEACHER SALARY SYSTEMS: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINA AND VIETNAM**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study compares university teacher salary systems in China and Vietnam by using qualitative document analysis of official policy documents, legal statutes, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed studies. The research examines how salary structures, performance-based incentives, and reform measures shape faculty motivation, research productivity, and job satisfaction. Its main innovation lies in combining policy document analysis with institutional and academic evidence to build a systematic comparative framework, rather than relying on a single type of source. The study finds that China has developed a more differentiated and performance-oriented salary model, while Vietnam maintains a more centralized and equity-based system. China's approach supports stronger research incentives and institutional competitiveness, but it may also create regional disparities and excessive pressure on measurable output. Vietnam's system promotes fairness and stability, yet its limited flexibility reduces competitiveness in attracting and retaining talented academics. Based on these findings, the article argues that Vietnam can learn from China's performance-linked reforms while adapting them to its own governance conditions and fiscal capacity. The study contributes to comparative higher education policy by showing how salary design affects faculty performance and institutional development in different political and economic contexts.

**Keywords:** university teacher salary system; China; Vietnam; higher education policy; document analysis

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

University teachers play a crucial role in determining the quality of higher education, and salary systems significantly affect their motivation, job satisfaction, and professional performance (Lien, 2017; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). China and Vietnam have adopted different policy approaches to university teacher compensation, resulting in substantial contrasts in salary structure, institutional incentives, and academic outcomes (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Pham & Hayden, 2019).

In China, university teacher salary reform has developed alongside broader higher education and public-sector reforms since the 1990s, with increasing emphasis on meritocracy,

differentiated rewards, and performance-based compensation (Wang, Lai, & Lo, 2014; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). Studies on Chinese higher education indicate that university faculty salaries are no longer determined only by rank and seniority, but are increasingly shaped by performance pay, institutional type, regional location, and research output (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). As a result, many Chinese universities have gradually moved toward a multi-component salary structure that combines basic pay with incentive-based and achievement-related components, especially those linked to research productivity and institutional competitiveness (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Study on the Impact of Teacher Salary Incentives on Teachers' Performance in Higher Education, 2022).

In contrast, Vietnam's salary structure for university teachers remains relatively rigid and is still largely embedded in the state salary framework, where remuneration is closely associated with qualifications, rank, and years of service rather than strong performance differentiation (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Nguyen, 2026). Although this system supports administrative consistency and equity, it may reduce institutional flexibility and weaken the motivational effect of salary policies in a more competitive higher education environment (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Van Tran et al, 2023). Research on Vietnamese academic staff has shown that salary and related welfare conditions are among the key factors affecting job satisfaction, commitment, and work performance, indicating that compensation reform remains an important issue for the sector (Lien, 2017; Van Tran et al, 2023).

The disparity between the two systems has important implications for higher education development. Compared with China, Vietnam has made slower progress in linking university teacher pay to research productivity, institutional performance, and talent retention, which may constrain the ability of its universities to compete for highly qualified academics in the regional and global education market (Nguyen, 2026; Nguyen & Fraser, 2007). At the same time, Chinese universities have benefited from more flexible and differentiated compensation arrangements, although such reforms have also generated concerns about internal inequality, pressure for measurable outputs, and overemphasis on quantifiable research performance (Wang, Lai, & Lo, 2014; Hu & Yuan, 2021).

Despite recent reform efforts in Vietnam, the overall salary structure remains less competitive than that of China, especially in terms of incentive mechanisms and institutional autonomy (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Nguyen, 2026). This disparity may contribute to persistent challenges in Vietnam's higher education system, including difficulties in attracting and retaining talented faculty, strengthening research output, and improving international academic competitiveness (Nguyen & Fraser, 2007). By examining the policies and structures that shape university teacher salaries in both countries, this study seeks to clarify how compensation systems influence faculty performance and the broader development of higher education. In particular, insights from China's more performance-oriented reforms may offer useful lessons for Vietnam as it continues to modernize its university governance and align its higher education system with global standards (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Pham & Hayden, 2019).

## 2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs document analysis as its principal qualitative research method to examine policies governing university teacher salary systems in China and Vietnam. Document analysis

is widely recognized as an appropriate method for policy research because it allows the researcher to interpret official texts systematically, compare regulatory frameworks, and identify how policy design is linked to institutional outcomes. In this study, the method is used to review and analyze government policy documents, legal statutes, salary regulations, university reports, and relevant academic publications related to higher education in both countries. The analysis focuses on the structure of salary systems, the trajectory of reform, and the reported effects of compensation arrangements on teacher performance, research output, and job satisfaction.

**2.1 Policy Document Analysis**

The first stage of the analysis examines official policy documents, legal statutes, and reform texts related to university teacher salary systems in China and Vietnam. This stage is intended to identify the legal foundations of teacher remuneration, the degree of centralization or institutional autonomy in salary determination, and the formal incorporation of performance-based components into salary policy. Through this process, the study compares how the two countries regulate salary structures, define compensation components, and frame the relationship between pay, academic responsibility, and institutional development.

**Policy Documents and Legal Statutes from China (7 Documents)**

Name of Document	Year	Key Provisions	Salary Structure and Reform	Outcomes on Teacher Performance, Research Output, and Satisfaction
Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China	1993 (effective 1994)	Safeguards teachers' rights, establishes qualifications, and outlines material benefits	Teachers' average salary should not be lower than state public servants; regular promotion and pay rise system to be established	Aimed to improve teacher status and attract talent to the profession
Provisional Regulations for State Civil Servants	1993	Applied to staff in the national administrative Bianzhi system	Included university teachers in civil service pay scale	Provided stability but limited flexibility in salary structures
Law on Civil Servants	2005	Clarified application to staff in the national administrative Bianzhi system	Continued inclusion of university teachers in civil service pay scale	Maintained stability but potentially limited competitiveness
Performance Salary System	2006	Introduced performance-based pay for university teachers	Three-tier system: base salary, performance-based pay, and bonuses	Increased focus on measurable outputs, potentially at the expense of long-term research
Guiding Opinions on Accelerating High-Level Personnel Development in Universities	2017	Emphasized contractual relationships and enhanced legal awareness	Promoted management of employment contracts	Aimed to improve talent retention and development

Reform of the Salary System of Public Institutions	2015	Optimized salary structure in public institutions, including universities	Aimed to balance fixed salary and performance-based pay	Intended to provide stability while maintaining incentives
Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Evaluation System in Education	2020	Proposed reforms to evaluation criteria for educators	Aimed to reduce emphasis on quantitative metrics in performance assessment	Intended to encourage quality over quantity in research and teaching

## Policy Documents and Legal Statutes from Vietnam (7 Documents)

Name of Document	Year	Key Provisions	Salary Structure and Reform	Outcomes on Teacher Performance, Research Output, and Satisfaction
Education Law (amended)	2009	Outlines entitlements for teachers including salary, allowances, and benefits	Establishes basis for professional salary, preferential allowances, and seniority allowances	Sets foundation for teacher compensation, potentially impacting motivation and performance
Decree 204/2004/ND-CP	2004	Defines salary calculation method for tenured teachers	Introduces salary coefficient system	Provides structure for salary progression, potentially influencing career satisfaction
Resolution 27-NQ/TW	2018	Comprehensive salary policy reform plan	Proposes new salary structure with base salary, allowances, and bonuses	Aims to improve overall compensation, potentially enhancing job satisfaction and performance
Resolution 104/2023/QH15	2023	State budget allocation for salary reform	Implements 32% salary increase from July 1, 2024	Expected to boost teacher income and potentially improve job satisfaction
Circular 22/2023/TT-BGDĐT	2023	Establishes professional ethics standards for pre-university teachers	Not directly related to salary, but impacts overall professional expectations	Sets benchmarks for teacher conduct, potentially influencing performance evaluation
Decree 24/2023/ND-CP	2023	Updates statutory pay rate	Increases base salary to 1,800,000 VND/month	Directly impacts take-home pay, potentially affecting job satisfaction
Resolution 01/NQ-CP	2024	Assigns implementation of new minimum wage decree	Prepares for salary adjustments in different regions	Aims to align public sector salaries with business sector, potentially improving competitiveness

A total of 14 official policy documents are reviewed in order to extract comparable information on salary structures, performance-based pay arrangements, reform priorities, and recent changes in university teacher compensation in both countries. These documents provide the

primary policy evidence for the study and establish the institutional context within which salary reforms are designed and implemented.

## 2.2 Institutional Reports and Publications

The second stage of the analysis reviews institutional reports from selected universities and a set of academic publications in order to obtain secondary evidence on the practical outcomes of salary systems. This part of the study is designed to complement the policy document analysis by showing how salary structures operate in practice and how they are associated with teacher performance, research productivity, and job satisfaction at the institutional level. In this way, the study does not rely only on formal regulations but also considers published evidence on implementation and outcomes.

### Institutional Reports from China (Top 5 Universities)

Name of University	Year of Report	Key Findings on Salary System	Outcomes on Teacher Performance, Research Output, and Satisfaction
Tsinghua University	2024	Three-tier system: base salary, performance-based pay, and bonuses; highest average monthly salary of 12,807 yuan five years after graduation	High research output and global rankings; strong correlation between salary and performance
Peking University	2024	Performance-linked compensation; average monthly salary of 11,227 yuan five years after graduation	Improved research productivity; high job satisfaction among faculty
Fudan University	2024	Comprehensive salary structure with emphasis on research incentives; average monthly salary of 11,661 yuan five years after graduation	Enhanced research output; increased international collaborations
Shanghai Jiao Tong University	2024	Merit-based salary system; average monthly salary of 11,201 yuan five years after graduation	Improved teaching effectiveness; high levels of job satisfaction
Sun Yat-sen University	2022	Reformed salary structure focusing on performance metrics; significant rise in salary rankings	Increased research publications; improved teacher retention rates

### Institutional Reports from Vietnam (Top 5 Universities)

Name of University	Year of Report	Key Findings on Salary System	Outcomes on Teacher Performance, Research Output, and Satisfaction
Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST)	2023	Offers competitive salaries with additional research incentives; reached revenue VND 2.14 trillion in 2023.	Increased research output due to financial rewards for publications; moderate job satisfaction among faculty

University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH)	2023	Provides substantial bonuses for research and teaching excellence; increased revenue to VND 1.68 trillion in 2023.	Improved teacher performance and higher satisfaction due to financial autonomy and research incentives
Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU)	2023	Implements performance-based pay with significant rewards for international publications.	High levels of research output and job satisfaction among faculty due to competitive salaries and incentives
National Economics University (NEU)	2023	Focuses on salary increases tied to institutional revenue growth (VND 1.41 trillion in 2023).	Moderate improvement in teacher satisfaction and performance, though challenges remain for attracting top talent
FPT University	2023	Country competitive salaries funded largely through tuition revenue (VND 2.92 trillion in 2023).	High faculty satisfaction due to financial stability and autonomy; significant contributions to research and teaching quality

## Academic Publications Review (10 Peer-Reviewed Articles)

Name of Article	Country	Key Findings	Data on Salary Structure	Impact on Faculty Motivation and Output
Factors Affecting Lecturer Job Satisfaction: Case of Vietnam Universities	Vietnam	Salary is a significant factor in job satisfaction	Average monthly income ranges from 3-15 million VND	Higher salaries correlate with increased job satisfaction and productivity (Lien, 2017)
Does education improve employee benefits in Vietnam?	Vietnam	Higher education levels generally lead to better compensation	University graduates earn 26% more than high school graduates	Improved benefits may enhance motivation and retention of faculty (Trung et al, 2019)
Salary Satisfaction of Vietnamese Teachers	Vietnam	Teacher salary satisfaction is at a normal level	No difference in average salary between different training levels	Private school teachers show higher salary satisfaction than public school teachers (Ha et al, 2024)
An Empirical Study on the Salary Disparity of Faculty in China	China	Significant salary disparities exist among faculty	Factors influencing salary: individual characteristics, institutional type, and regional differences	Salary disparities may impact faculty motivation and performance (Hu & Yuan, 2021)
Investigation and Analysis on the Development of Chinese Teachers	China	Increasing investments in teacher development	Teachers sent to China for study and research	Professional development opportunities may enhance motivation and research output (Tham & Zheng, 2019)
The Academic Profession in China	China	Reforms have led to performance-based salary systems	Salaries vary widely between institutions and regions	Performance-based pay aims to incentivize research and teaching excellence (Chen, 2003)
Teacher evaluation in China: latest trends and future directions	China	Rapid growth in faculty salaries over the past decade	Top-tier universities offer competitive salaries to attract talent	Higher salaries at elite institutions may motivate faculty to pursue research excellence (Liu & Zhao, 2013)

Job Satisfaction among Vietnamese Academic Staff	Vietnam	Multiple factors influence job satisfaction, including salary	Salary levels vary significantly between public and private institutions	Job satisfaction impacts teaching quality and research productivity (Van Tuan & Anh, 2024)
Compensation Policies for University Teachers in Vietnam	Vietnam	Recent reforms aim to improve teacher salaries	Introduction of performance-based bonuses	Higher compensation may lead to increased faculty retention and output (Linh et al, 2022)
A comparative study of the research capabilities of East Asian countries and implications for Vietnam	China, Vietnam	China offers higher salaries compared to Vietnam	Chinese universities have more flexible salary structures	Salary differences impact cross-border faculty mobility and research collaboration (Hien, 2010)

The evidence summarized in these institutional and academic sources indicates that the salary systems of university teachers in China and Vietnam differ substantially in both structure and implementation. In Vietnam, recent reforms have sought to improve teacher compensation, yet the overall system remains largely anchored in a state-regulated coefficient framework, with salary progression strongly shaped by qualifications, rank, and years of service rather than by extensive performance differentiation (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024). By contrast, studies of Chinese higher education describe a more differentiated and performance-oriented salary model in which compensation commonly combines basic salary, performance pay, and bonus mechanisms associated with research productivity, institutional ranking, and externally funded projects (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025).

These differences have important implications for higher education development in the two countries. The Vietnamese system appears to place greater emphasis on administrative consistency and equity, whereas the Chinese system places stronger emphasis on incentive-based differentiation and institutional competitiveness (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Li & Zou, 2024). Although some Vietnamese universities have introduced additional attraction and retention measures for highly qualified academics, the broader salary framework remains less flexible and generally less competitive than that of China, especially in relation to research incentives and talent recruitment (Hoang et al., 2024; Nguyen & Fraser, 2007). This situation may affect faculty retention, research output, and international competitiveness, and it reinforces the need for continued reform of university teacher salary policy in Vietnam.

## 2.3 Data Extraction and Comparative Analysis

Each document will be systematically coded to extract information on the principal dimensions of university teacher salary systems, including base salary arrangements, performance-related bonuses, research-based remuneration, allowances, and incentives for international collaboration (Cardno, 2018; Walt et al., 2021). Particular attention will be given to the institutional logic underlying these elements, such as whether compensation is determined primarily by seniority and administrative rank or by performance, research productivity, and institutional competitiveness (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). This coding process is intended to generate a structured body of comparable evidence from both policy documents and institutional materials.

The extracted data will then be organized into thematic categories, including salary structure, reform orientation, research incentives, job satisfaction, and faculty motivation, in order to facilitate systematic comparison between China and Vietnam (Cardno, 2018; Owen, 2014). Through this thematic analysis, the study will identify major similarities, differences, and emerging trends in the design and implementation of university teacher salary policies in the two countries (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Nguyen & Fraser, 2007). Such categorization allows the analysis to move beyond descriptive review and toward a more interpretive understanding of how salary systems reflect broader policy priorities in higher education.

The comparative analysis will further evaluate the extent to which these salary policies contribute to improved teacher performance, stronger research output, and higher levels of job satisfaction among university faculty (Hoang et al., 2024; Van Tran et al., 2023). In this way, the study provides an analytical basis for assessing the relative strengths and limitations of the Chinese and Vietnamese salary systems and for identifying policy lessons that may inform future reforms in Vietnam's higher education sector (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Pham & Hayden, 2019).

### 3.0 RESULTS

The comparative analysis of university teacher salary systems in China and Vietnam reveals both convergence and divergence, shaped by the two countries' distinct historical trajectories, governance traditions, and higher education reform agendas (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hu & Yuan, 2021). In both cases, salary policy has become an important instrument for improving higher education quality, strengthening faculty motivation, and enhancing institutional competitiveness, although the pace and design of reform differ substantially between the two systems (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Hoang et al., 2024).

#### 3.1 Key Similarities

China and Vietnam share several important similarities in their approaches to university teacher salary systems, especially in relation to centralized policy steering, the gradual incorporation of performance-based incentives, and the expansion of institutional autonomy within state-defined limits (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024). Although the two systems differ in degree and implementation, both countries continue to treat faculty compensation as a strategic policy issue closely connected to educational quality, research productivity, and national development (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Nguyen & Fraser, 2007).

First, both countries rely on centralized policy frameworks to regulate university teacher salaries. In Vietnam, salary determination remains strongly embedded in the state administrative framework, where pay is shaped by official regulations, salary coefficients, rank, and years of service, reflecting a highly centralized governance model (Pham & Hayden, 2019). In China, although universities have gained more room for differentiated compensation, major reforms in teacher remuneration have also been promoted through national-level policy directives, especially those related to performance pay and salary restructuring in public institutions (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Gao, 2019). In this respect, both systems demonstrate that state authority continues to play a decisive role in framing university salary policy, even where implementation is partly decentralized.

Second, both Vietnam and China have introduced performance-based elements into university teacher compensation. In Vietnam, recent reforms have attempted to supplement the traditional salary framework with bonuses and incentives associated with professional contribution, teaching quality, and research activity, although these mechanisms remain more limited in scope than in China (Hoang et al., 2024). In China, by contrast, performance-related pay has become a more visible and institutionalized component of academic remuneration, particularly through salary arrangements that combine basic salary with performance pay and various forms of bonus compensation linked to research output and institutional objectives (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). Despite the differences in scale, the inclusion of incentive-based pay in both countries reflects a shared movement toward merit-oriented governance in higher education.

Third, both countries have taken steps to expand institutional autonomy in higher education, including greater flexibility in personnel and financial management. Vietnam's university autonomy reforms have gradually allowed institutions to make more decisions concerning governance, budgeting, staffing, and academic operations, though these decisions still operate within a relatively strong state framework (Pham & Hayden, 2019). Similarly, Chinese universities have been granted increasing discretion in recruitment, internal distribution of salary components, and incentive design, enabling them to respond more actively to competition for talent and research performance (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Liu & Zhao, 2013). In both systems, therefore, institutional autonomy has expanded not as a rejection of state control but as a managed reform mechanism intended to improve efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness.

Overall, the similarities between China and Vietnam lie in their shared reliance on state-led regulation, their gradual adoption of performance-based incentives, and their efforts to enhance institutional autonomy within broader reform processes. These common features suggest that both countries are attempting to balance centralized governance with institutional flexibility in order to strengthen higher education systems and improve faculty performance (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025).

## 3.2 Key Differences

### Historical Context

The major differences between the two salary systems are rooted in their different reform trajectories and policy logics. China's university salary system has undergone more extensive restructuring since the late twentieth century, in parallel with broader market-oriented reforms in higher education and public administration (Gao, 2019; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). Over time, Chinese universities moved away from a strictly uniform public-sector compensation model toward more differentiated arrangements that reward academic rank, research achievement, institutional status, and externally funded activity (Hu & Yuan, 2021). This transition has supported the emergence of a more competitive academic labor market in which salary is increasingly used as a mechanism to attract high-level talent and stimulate research productivity (Li & Zou, 2024; Liu & Zhao, 2013).

Vietnam's university salary system, while also influenced by post-Đổi Mới reform, has remained more strongly shaped by the state administrative pay framework and by concerns for consistency, equity, and fiscal control (Pham & Hayden, 2019). Although market-oriented changes have gradually entered the higher education sector, Vietnam has adopted a more cautious and incremental approach to compensation reform. Recent policy changes have introduced additional bonuses and incentives, yet the overall system remains more centralized and less differentiated than that of China (Hoang et al., 2024). As a result, the reform trajectory in Vietnam reflects a stronger tendency to balance modernization with administrative stability, whereas China has moved further toward competitive and performance-oriented remuneration.

In this sense, both countries have pursued reform, but they have done so from different historical and ideological starting points. China has emphasized flexibility, differentiation, and institutional competitiveness, while Vietnam has maintained a more gradual reform path shaped by centralized regulation and broader public-sector salary logic (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025).

## Policy Framework

The policy frameworks governing university teacher salaries in China and Vietnam also differ in important ways. In Vietnam, salary policy remains closely tied to central government regulation, and the Ministry of Education and Training continues to play a major role in shaping the institutional environment within which universities operate (Pham & Hayden, 2019). Although reforms have sought to improve teacher compensation and introduce limited incentive mechanisms, the dominant framework still relies on salary coefficients, administrative rank, qualifications, and years of service as the main determinants of earnings (Hoang et al., 2024). This model supports uniformity and predictability, but it also restricts the capacity of individual universities to adjust salaries strategically in response to labor market competition or disciplinary differences.

China, by contrast, has developed a policy framework that gives universities relatively greater discretion in structuring compensation packages and linking pay to measurable performance (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). Performance-based salary reform and related governance changes have enabled institutions to use salary more actively as an instrument for rewarding research productivity, attracting high-performing scholars, and supporting institutional ambitions such as "Double First-Class" development and international competitiveness (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Li & Zou, 2024). Even though central policy guidance remains influential, the Chinese system operates with more room for local adaptation and internal differentiation than the Vietnamese one.

These policy differences produce different implementation outcomes. Salary levels in Chinese universities are generally more differentiated across institutions, regions, and academic ranks, whereas Vietnamese salaries remain more standardized and comparatively lower in their incentive intensity (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Nguyen & Fraser, 2007). Institutional autonomy has expanded in both countries, but Vietnam's universities still face more administrative constraints in financial and personnel decisions than many of their Chinese counterparts (Pham & Hayden, 2019). In addition, while both systems have embraced performance-related pay, China places stronger emphasis on research output, talent recruitment, and international

academic competitiveness, whereas Vietnam more often seeks to balance teaching, research, and social contribution within a less flexible fiscal structure (Hoang et al., 2024; Pham & Hayden, 2019).

## Salary Structure

The salary structures of university faculty in China and Vietnam contain similar formal components, but they differ markedly in configuration and emphasis. In China, faculty compensation is generally composed of base salary, performance pay, and various subsidies or allowances, with a relatively strong role for incentive-based and achievement-related elements (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). Basic salary provides a degree of stability, but performance bonuses and year-end rewards are important sources of differentiation, especially for faculty with strong research records, recognized talent status, or positions in elite universities (Hu & Yuan, 2021). This structure has helped institutions reward high productivity and pursue strategic academic priorities, but it has also contributed to widening salary gaps among faculty members and across institutions.

In Vietnam, faculty salary structures also include basic salary, allowances, and in some cases bonuses, but the proportion and influence of performance-based elements are generally more limited (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024). The dominant logic remains one of standardized progression through rank, qualification, and service duration, with less differentiation by institutional prestige or research intensity. This arrangement supports equity and administrative coherence, but it may weaken the motivational power of salary and reduce universities' ability to compete for highly qualified scholars in a more internationalized academic environment (Nguyen & Fraser, 2007).

Accordingly, while both countries include fixed and variable elements in faculty pay, China's model is more differentiated and competition-oriented, whereas Vietnam's model is more standardized and equity-oriented. The former prioritizes strategic incentives and institutional stratification, while the latter places greater emphasis on consistency and balanced recognition of faculty roles (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Pham & Hayden, 2019).

## Key Features and Innovations

China's salary system is distinguished by a stronger emphasis on research excellence, talent recruitment, and institutional competition. National and university-level talent policies, together with performance-linked salary components, have been used to attract high-level scholars, encourage publication in influential journals, and strengthen global research visibility (Li & Zou, 2024; Gao, 2019). This research-centered orientation has contributed to the rapid rise of many Chinese universities in international rankings and publication output, but it has also raised concerns about excessive competition, pressure to publish, and the marginalization of teaching and service responsibilities (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Li & Zou, 2024).

Vietnam, by contrast, has followed a more gradual and holistic reform path. Its compensation policies have tended to place greater value on balanced faculty development, including teaching effectiveness, research activity, and broader institutional or community contribution (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024). Although Vietnam has introduced incentive measures and begun to adopt more performance-sensitive approaches, these reforms have

generally been more incremental and constrained by limited resources and administrative regulation. This reflects an attempt to improve faculty compensation without fully abandoning a more egalitarian policy orientation.

## Challenges and Criticisms

Both countries also face important challenges in relation to salary reform. In China, one major concern is the growing disparity between institutions, regions, and categories of academic staff, especially as elite universities and high-level talent programs command much stronger financial resources than ordinary institutions (Hu & Yuan, 2021). Another issue is the pressure placed on faculty by performance evaluation systems that prioritize quantifiable research output, sometimes at the expense of teaching quality, collegiality, and academic well-being (Li & Zou, 2024).

In Vietnam, the principal challenges lie in the continuing centralization of governance, limited financial capacity, and the difficulty of designing competitive salary packages within the existing public-sector framework (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024). These constraints reduce the ability of universities to attract and retain highly qualified faculty and may slow progress in research productivity and international competitiveness. Thus, while China faces the risks of excessive differentiation and performance pressure, Vietnam faces the risks of insufficient flexibility and underinvestment.

Taken together, the comparison shows that China and Vietnam are pursuing similar reform goals but through markedly different institutional pathways. China's salary system is more competitive, differentiated, and research-driven, whereas Vietnam's remains more centralized, gradual, and equity-oriented. These differences reflect broader contrasts in governance, fiscal capacity, and higher education strategy, and they help explain the divergent outcomes observed in faculty motivation, salary flexibility, and institutional competitiveness.

## 4.0 DISCUSSION

A comparison of China and Vietnam's university salary systems and faculty incentive mechanisms reveals several important contrasts, each reflecting broader differences in governance, reform strategy, and higher education priorities (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hu & Yuan, 2021). While China has pursued a more competitive and performance-driven model, Vietnam has generally favored a more centralized and balanced approach, producing different strengths as well as different structural constraints within its respective higher education systems (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Hoang et al., 2024).

### 4.1 Autonomy and Flexibility

One of the clearest contrasts concerns the degree of institutional autonomy in salary design. In China, universities have been granted relatively greater flexibility to structure compensation packages, distribute performance-related pay, and use incentives strategically to recruit and retain talented academics (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Liu & Zhao, 2013). This flexibility has allowed institutions, particularly elite and research-intensive universities, to adapt salary arrangements to disciplinary competition, research priorities, and talent recruitment goals. However, greater autonomy has also contributed to unequal outcomes, since universities

located in economically advanced and high-status regions are usually better positioned to offer more attractive salaries and benefits than institutions in less developed areas (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Tang et al., 2022).

Vietnam, in contrast, continues to operate within a more centralized salary framework in which the state retains stronger control over compensation principles and universities have less room to adjust pay structures independently (Pham & Hayden, 2019). This approach promotes a stronger sense of uniformity and administrative fairness across institutions, which can help reduce extreme disparities in formal salary structures. At the same time, the limited flexibility of this system may reduce universities' capacity to respond quickly to local labor-market conditions, disciplinary shortages, or institutional development strategies. As a result, while the Vietnamese model supports equity and consistency, it may also constrain innovation in compensation policy and weaken institutions' ability to use salary as a strategic governance tool.

## 4.2 Performance Incentives

A second major contrast lies in the use and orientation of performance incentives. In China, incentive structures are more strongly tied to research output, publication performance, grant acquisition, and broader institutional competitiveness (Li & Zou, 2024; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). This emphasis has helped stimulate substantial academic productivity and has contributed to the growing international visibility of Chinese universities, especially in research-intensive sectors (Gao, 2019; Hu & Yuan, 2021). Yet the strong concentration on measurable research output can also create distortions, including pressure to publish, widening internal inequalities, and the relative devaluation of teaching quality and service contributions.

Vietnam adopts a comparatively broader and more balanced understanding of faculty contribution. Although research productivity has become more important in recent reforms, Vietnam's policy orientation still places considerable weight on teaching effectiveness, institutional service, and broader social contribution alongside research performance (Hoang et al., 2024; Pham & Hayden, 2019). This more holistic perspective may support more rounded faculty development and better alignment with national educational goals. However, because incentive intensity remains lower and research-linked rewards are less pronounced than in China, the Vietnamese system may be less effective in driving high-impact research performance and global academic competitiveness.

## 4.3 Talent Attraction

The two countries also differ significantly in talent attraction strategy. China has pursued a highly proactive approach to academic talent recruitment through national and institutional initiatives that combine competitive salary packages, strong research support, and prestigious professional opportunities (Li & Zou, 2024; Shi et al., 2023). Programs such as the Young Thousand Talents initiative illustrate how compensation policy is integrated with broader strategies for enhancing scientific capacity and attracting internationally trained scholars back to Chinese universities (Shi et al., 2023). This model has strengthened China's position in global academic competition, especially by linking salary incentives with research funding, laboratory resources, and career advancement.

Vietnam's approach has been more incremental. Reform efforts have sought to improve institutional competitiveness by expanding autonomy, strengthening research support, and introducing selective incentive mechanisms, but these reforms have generally developed on a smaller scale and under tighter fiscal and administrative constraints (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024). As a result, Vietnam has made progress in improving its higher education environment, but its current salary and recruitment mechanisms remain less aggressive and less internationally visible than those of China. This suggests that, if Vietnam intends to compete more effectively for high-level domestic and international academic talent, further reform may be needed in both compensation policy and institutional financing.

Taken together, these comparative insights show that China and Vietnam are pursuing different pathways toward the improvement of university faculty compensation. China's system benefits from greater flexibility, stronger research incentives, and more assertive talent attraction mechanisms, but it also faces problems of regional disparity, performance pressure, and internal inequality (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Tang et al., 2022). Vietnam's system promotes more consistency and broader recognition of faculty roles, yet its centralized structure may reduce responsiveness, innovation, and international competitiveness (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024). For both countries, the long-term challenge is not simply to raise salaries, but to design compensation systems that balance autonomy with equity, reward performance without narrowing academic roles, and support sustainable institutional development in an increasingly competitive global higher education environment.

## 5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The experiences of China and Vietnam in reforming university teacher salary systems offer important policy lessons for improving higher education quality, reducing structural disparities, and strengthening institutional capacity. Although the two countries operate under different governance traditions and resource conditions, both demonstrate that salary policy is a critical mechanism for shaping faculty motivation, research productivity, and the long-term competitiveness of universities (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024). Accordingly, policymaking in both contexts should focus not only on increasing remuneration but also on ensuring that compensation systems are equitable, strategically aligned, and supportive of broader educational goals.

### 5.1 Addressing Regional Disparities and Rebalancing Incentives in China

In China, one of the most urgent policy challenges is the existence of substantial regional and institutional disparities in salary levels, research resources, and opportunities for academic development. Universities in economically advanced regions and elite institutional tiers are generally better positioned to provide competitive salaries, attractive research conditions, and stronger career incentives than institutions in less-developed inland provinces (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Tang et al., 2022). To address this imbalance, Chinese policymakers should further expand targeted investment in under-resourced regions, including improved infrastructure, research facilities, faculty development programs, and interregional support mechanisms. Such measures would help reduce inequalities in higher education provision and strengthen the capacity of less-advantaged universities to recruit and retain qualified staff.

At the same time, China's strong reliance on research-oriented performance incentives should be reconsidered in order to achieve a more balanced model of academic evaluation. Although research-linked pay has contributed significantly to publication output and international visibility, the heavy emphasis on quantifiable research performance may unintentionally marginalize teaching quality, student support, and community engagement (Li & Zou, 2024; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). A more balanced policy framework would therefore include clearer recognition of excellence in teaching and service, alongside research achievement. By introducing incentives for pedagogical innovation, student mentorship, and socially engaged academic work, China could promote a broader conception of academic excellence while also reducing excessive publication pressure on faculty members.

## 5.2 Enhancing Autonomy, Expanding Funding, and Learning from China in Vietnam

For Vietnam, several policy priorities emerge from the comparative analysis. First, increasing institutional autonomy remains essential. Greater autonomy would allow universities to design more flexible compensation packages, respond more effectively to disciplinary and regional labor-market conditions, and develop incentive structures that reflect their academic missions and development strategies (Pham & Hayden, 2019; ). In the long term, decentralizing selected aspects of salary governance could enhance institutional responsiveness and improve universities' ability to compete for highly qualified domestic and international academics.

Second, greater public and institutional investment in higher education is necessary if salary reform is to produce meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Without stronger financial support, universities will remain limited in their ability to offer competitive salaries, modernize infrastructure, expand research opportunities, and provide professional development for faculty members (Hoang et al., 2024). Increased funding would not only improve academic working conditions but also contribute to stronger research productivity, better teaching quality, and more resilient institutional development. In this respect, salary reform should be treated as part of a broader strategy of higher education modernization rather than as an isolated administrative adjustment.

Vietnam may also draw useful lessons from China's experience in linking compensation policy to research development. China's use of performance-based incentives and research-oriented promotion pathways has helped stimulate academic productivity and strengthen university competitiveness (Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025; Gao, 2019). While Vietnam should not simply replicate the Chinese model, it could adapt selected elements by establishing clearer research funding channels, strengthening merit-based recognition for scholarly achievement, and developing promotion systems that more explicitly reward high-quality research. Such reforms could encourage a more active research culture while remaining compatible with Vietnam's broader educational priorities.

Although Vietnam experiences fewer extreme regional disparities than China, inequalities in institutional resources and academic capacity across provinces still require policy attention. Targeted funding, infrastructure support, and capacity-building initiatives for less-developed regions would help reduce unevenness in educational opportunity and improve national system performance. At the same time, Vietnam's more holistic framework for evaluating faculty performance should be preserved and refined rather than replaced. By continuing to recognize

teaching quality, research achievement, and community contribution together, Vietnam can promote a more balanced and sustainable model of academic development while gradually strengthening its international competitiveness (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hoang et al., 2024).

Taken together, these recommendations suggest that both countries have important opportunities for further reform. For China, the main priorities lie in reducing regional disparities and moderating the overconcentration of incentives on research output. For Vietnam, the more urgent needs involve expanding institutional autonomy, increasing funding capacity, and designing more effective research incentives within a balanced evaluation framework. By learning selectively from one another's experience, both countries can strengthen the effectiveness, fairness, and strategic value of university teacher salary policy in the context of global higher education competition.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

This comparative study of university teacher salary systems in China and Vietnam shows that the two countries differ substantially in the design, implementation, and policy orientation of faculty compensation in higher education. China has developed a more differentiated and performance-oriented model that is closely linked to research productivity, talent recruitment, and institutional competition, whereas Vietnam has maintained a more centralized and equity-oriented framework shaped by state regulation, standardized salary structures, and a broader evaluation of faculty roles (Pham & Hayden, 2019; Hongyu & Shanjun, 2025). These differences reflect not only distinct approaches to salary administration but also wider contrasts in governance, reform strategy, and higher education development.

The comparison suggests that China's experience offers several useful lessons for Vietnam, particularly in relation to the strategic use of incentives to improve research output, strengthen faculty motivation, and enhance institutional competitiveness. At the same time, the Chinese case also demonstrates the risks associated with excessive performance pressure, widening internal disparities, and overemphasis on measurable research outputs (Hu & Yuan, 2021; Li & Zou, 2024). For this reason, any adaptation of performance-based salary reform in Vietnam must be selective and context-sensitive rather than imitative. Reforms need to be aligned with Vietnam's fiscal capacity, governance arrangements, and institutional conditions in order to remain both feasible and sustainable.

More broadly, the study confirms that salary policy is not merely an administrative matter, but a central component of higher education development. Well-designed compensation systems influence teacher motivation, faculty retention, research productivity, and the overall quality and competitiveness of universities. For Vietnam, learning from China's experience may provide a practical basis for strengthening university salary policy while preserving its own emphasis on balance, equity, and broader educational contribution. In this sense, the reform of university teacher salary systems should be understood as an essential part of Vietnam's long-term effort to build a more dynamic, internationally competitive, and academically sustainable higher education sector.

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