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Professionalism of Vietnam civil servants in the context of international integration

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Abstract: Professionalism constitutes a core requirement for civil servants in the public service, particularly in the context of Vietnam's deepening international integration. This study aims to clarify the essential qualities, capacities and professional reputation that Vietnamese civil servants must possess to meet contemporary governance demands. To accomplish this, the research examines current legal documents governing civil servant standards and surveys 175 respondents to assess the current status and solution requirements for enhancing professionalism. Findings indicate that reforms in public administration and the pressures of international integration have contributed to improving the qualities, capacities and professional standing of civil servants. Nevertheless, persistent limitations remain, especially regarding foreign language proficiency, technological competence and the uneven ability to adapt to global administrative practices. These shortcomings highlight the need for continued efforts to strengthen professional standards. Drawing on survey data, legal analysis and empirical assessment, the study proposes targeted solutions aimed at promoting a more capable, adaptive and internationally aligned civil service capable of meeting present and future challenges.

Keywords: Professionalism, Civil Service, Civil Service Reform, Vietnam, International Integration

1. Introduction

Building a contingent of cadres and civil servants who possess sound political qualities, professional competence, and ethical integrity is one of the key prerequisites for ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery. It is also a central factor in guaranteeing the success of administrative reform and modern public governance. In the context of globalization, digital transformation, and growing public expectations, the competence and ethics of civil servants have increasingly become a strategic issue in the formulation and implementation of public policies in Vietnam. As affirmed in the study by Khanh (2023), "a contingent of cadres and civil servants with sufficient qualities, competence, and integrity is a decisive factor for the effective implementation of public duties"⁴. Therefore, strengthening the capacity and improving the institutional framework for managing this contingency has become an urgent and top-priority national requirement.

This viewpoint is also clearly reflected in key political and legal documents. Specifically, the Resolution of the XIIIth National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam emphasizes that cadre work has seen "many innovations," and the contingent of cadres is increasingly "meeting the requirements and tasks in the new context." The Party's inspection, supervision, and disciplinary mechanisms have been tightened to enhance integrity, discipline, and a sense of responsibility within Party organizations, which serve as the training ground and supply source for key leadership in the state administrative apparatus⁵. At the state administrative level, the Government issued Resolution No. 76/NQ-CP dated July 15, 2021, approving the Master Program on State Administrative Reform for the 2021–2030 period⁶.

⁴ KHANH, P. T. L. K. "Capacity of cadres and civil servants in building a professional, responsible and talented civil service in Vietnam", 2023. Available at: <http://caicachanhchinh.gov.vn/mo-hinh-kinh-nghiem/chi-tiet/180> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁵ COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM. "Documents of the XIIIth National Congress of Delegates. Volume II", Hanoi: National Politics—The Truth, 2021b, p. 119. (This is a paper-published document).

⁶ GOVERNMENT. "Resolution No. 76/NQ-CP promulgating the overall program of state administrative reform for the period 2021-2030", 2021. Hanoi. Available at:

This document sets a core objective: “to build a professional, accountable, dynamic, and merit-based civil service,” thereby establishing a clear direction for developing civil servant capacity in line with modern public service standards. Accordingly, the competence of civil servants must be defined by four key criteria: professionalism, accountability, dynamism, and merit-based performance.

Based on the above analysis, this study seeks to identify and propose solutions to improve the professionalism of Vietnam’s civil service in the context of international integration, by addressing several key research questions: What is the current status of the Vietnamese civil service and the level of professionalism of civil servants? What are the new requirements for civil service professionalism in Vietnam? What are the main causes that hinder the development of professionalism within the civil service? And what measures should be taken to enhance professionalism among civil servants in Vietnam?

Answering these questions will help clarify the core issues and develop appropriate methods and indicator systems for assessing civil servant competence based on modern standards. In the transition from a bureaucratic administrative model to a public governance model, competence assessment criteria must be more comprehensive, considering not only professional qualifications but also public service ethics, digital skills, citizen engagement abilities, and problem-solving capacity. These questions also guide the analysis of current legal regulations to assess the extent to which the values articulated in Resolution 76/NQ-CP have been institutionalized.

This is a necessary step to identify “policy gaps” and to propose improvements to the public service legal framework. Furthermore, it aims to identify “invisible barriers” such as tenure-driven culture, risk aversion, lack of accountability, etc. During the survey process, many studies indicate that institutional obstacles and a mindset resistant to innovation among some civil servants remain significant impediments to administrative reform. At the same time, this raises a strategic issue in modern governance, suggesting the potential for applying models such as Competency-Based Human Resource Management (CB-HRM) or performance evaluation methods like KPI or Performance-Based Budgeting (PBB) in the public administration context.

2. Literature review

2.1. The civil service

Across jurisdictions, the concept of “civil servant” is shaped by the characteristics of each nation’s administrative system. The Public Service Act 1999, No. 147 of Australia stipulates that a civil servant is any individual recruited to perform official duties for the Commonwealth within a governmental department or executive agency⁷. In the Civil Service Law of the People’s Republic of China (2005), the term refers to individuals working in state organs, political consultative institutions and political organizations, while excluding personnel in uniformed services⁸. French administrative law identifies civil servants as those serving within

<https://mst.gov.vn/cai-cach-tthc-trong-chuong-trinh-tong-the-cai-cach-hanh-chinh-nha-nuoc-giai-doan-2021-2030-197147972.htm> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁷ AUSTRALIA. “Public Service Act 1999: no. 147, 1999: an act to provide for the establishment and management of the Australian Public Service, and for other purposes/[Australian Public Service Commission]”, 1999. Available at: <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/3724969> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁸ FENG JUN, et al. “China’s New Strategies for Governing the Country”. Understanding Modern China Series. People’s Publishing House. ACA Publishing Ltd, 2016. COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM. “Documents of the XIIIth National Congress of Delegates. Volume II”, Hanoi: National Politics__The Truth, 2021b, p. 119. (This is a paper-published document).

the executive apparatus of the State or territorial communities, as well as within administrative institutions or autonomous agencies, all of whom share the defining traits of stable and continuous public employment⁹.

From a legal theory perspective, these definitions reveal a common core: public servants are subject to public law, establishing a special legal relationship with the State, characterized by dependence on the government, continuity in public service, and higher legal responsibility. This relationship distinguishes public servants from contract workers in the private sector, as it is primarily governed by public law norms rather than private labor law.

In Vietnam, Clause 2, Article 1 of the Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2025, "Civil Servants are Vietnamese citizens recruited into positions in agencies of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the State, the Vietnam Fatherland Front, and political-social organizations at the central, provincial, and commune levels; in agencies and units of the People's Army that are not officers, professional soldiers, defense workers, or civil servants; in agencies and units of the People's Public Security that are not officers, non-commissioned officers, professional soldiers, or police workers; and in cryptographic organizations that are not cryptographic personnel, on the payroll, and receiving salaries from the state budget"¹⁰.

Legally, this definition identifies civil servants as those who hold state power and whose actions have a direct legal effect on citizens and organizations. Therefore, professionalism among Vietnamese civil servants cannot be understood merely as a management or ethical concept; it must be considered a legal requirement linked to the state's obligation to ensure the legitimacy, equality, and efficiency of public administration.

Synthesizing the above regulations, civil servants may be generally understood as citizens formally recruited and appointed to perform public duties within the state or political institutions, including specified units of the armed forces and public security, under a status that carries payroll inclusion and salary funded by the state budget.

2.2. The professionalism of the civil service

Resolution No. 76/NQ-CP (dated July 15, 2021) sets the goal of building a professional, responsible, dynamic, and competency-based public service¹¹. Although this orientation is expressed in policy terms, its legal significance lies in the State's obligation to translate these principles into enforceable legal norms, regulating the recruitment, performance evaluation, discipline, and legal responsibility of civil servants.

Professionalism is demonstrated through behavior, work style, and work efficiency. Legally, professionalism serves as a normative standard for evaluating the compliance of civil servants with their statutory obligations. It directly forms the foundation of legal mechanisms such as administrative accountability, disciplinary measures, and compensation for unlawful administrative actions.

Professionalism is inseparable from transparency. Transparency is not only a moral aspiration but also a legally enforceable principle, rooted in administrative law, ensuring citizens' right to access information, monitor administrative activities, and appeal unlawful decisions. Failure to comply with transparency obligations can

⁹ JAMES W. GARNER. "French Administrative Law", *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 6, Apr 1924, p. 597-627. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/787920> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

¹⁰ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)", 2025, Hanoi. Available at: <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&doid=214576> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

¹¹ GOVERNMENT. "Resolution No. 76/NQ-CP promulgating the overall program of state administrative reform for the period 2021-2030". 2021. *Ibid*.

lead to legal consequences under anti-corruption laws and administrative litigation laws.

Accountability requires public officials to accept responsibility for the results achieved. Legally, accountability operates through clearly defined power structures, the allocation of authority, and mechanisms of legal responsibility, including disciplinary, material, and in some cases, criminal responsibility.

Dynamism is often associated with innovation. However, from a legal perspective, dynamism must be exercised within the limits of the law. Innovation in public administration is only permissible when it respects legal regulations, procedural safeguards, and legal principles, which remain the foundation of a rule of law state.

A merit-based system ensures appointments based on merit. Therefore, meritocracy serves as a principle of constitutional and administrative law, protecting equality in access to public services and preventing arbitrariness, bias, and abuse of power in personnel decisions.

2.3. New requirements for civil service professionalism

Studies by Nguyen (2023)¹², Khanh (2023)¹³, Kim & Lee (2024)¹⁴, Eriksen et al. (2025)¹⁵ and Egeberg (2025)¹⁶ all highlight that civil servants, as the central operational force within public administration, are confronted with increasingly complex and evolving demands. From an examination of Vietnam's regulatory framework including the Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2008 (amended 2019)¹⁷, the Law on Anti Corruption 2018¹⁸, the Law on Government Organization 2015 (amended 2019)¹⁹, the Law on Local Government Organization 2015 (amended 2019)²⁰ and guiding decrees such as No. 90/2020/NĐ-CP²¹, No. 138/2020/ND-CP²²,

¹² NGUYEN, B. V. "Administrative reform in our country-Current situation and some proposals", Democracy and Law Journal online, 2023. Available at: <https://danchuphapluat.vn/cai-cach-hanh-chinh-o-nuoc-ta-thuc-trang-va-mot-so-de-xuat-3048.html> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

¹³ KHANH, P. T. L. "Capacity of cadres and civil servants in building a professional, responsible and talented civil service in Vietnam". 2023. Ibid.

¹⁴ KIM, S., OH, P., & LEE, J. "Algorithmic gender bias: Investigating perceptions of discrimination in automated decision-making", Behaviour & Information Technology, 43(16), 2024, p. 4208-4221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2024.2306484>

¹⁵ ERIKSEN, A., & ERIKSEN, E. O. "Multilevel reasoning: Conciliation and deference in complex administrative order", International Journal of Public Administration, 48(5-6), 2025, p. 334-345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2024.2435896>

¹⁶ EGEBERG, M. "International organizations, the EU and peace among member states: Bringing organization structure", Journal of Peace Research, 62(3), 2025, p. 753-760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433241249328>

¹⁷ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Civil Servants, amended and supplemented (Law No. 52/2019/QH14)", 2019. Hanoi. Available at: <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/default.aspx?pageid=27160&docid=198543> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

¹⁸ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Anti-Corruption (Law No. 36/2018/QH14)", 2018, Hanoi. Available at: <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=206104> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

¹⁹ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Organization of Local Government (Law No. 77/2015/QH13)", 2015, Hanoi. Available at: <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=198544> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

²⁰ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Organization of the Government and Law on Organization of Local Government, amended and supplemented (Law No. 47/2019/QH14)", 2019, Hanoi. Available at: <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=198544> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

²¹ GOVERNMENT. "Decree No. 90/2020/ND-CP on assessment and classification of the quality of cadres, civil servants and public employees", 2020, Hanoi. Available at:

No. 170/2025/ND-CP²³ this study identifies five principal competency requirements.

The first requirement concerns advanced expertise and interdisciplinary knowledge. Civil servants must now demonstrate strong professional foundations and an ability to engage with global legal and administrative standards. For example, officers in investment and trade must understand WTO, CPTPP and EVFTA commitments, while environmental administrators must internalize instruments such as the Paris Agreement. Yet MOHA's 2021 Administrative Reform Report shows that only 0.4% of civil servants have doctoral qualifications and 3.7% hold master's degrees, revealing a sizable gap in specialized and internationally oriented expertise²⁴.

The second requirement relates to digital governance capacity and adaptability to transformation. As global integration proceeds alongside rapid digitalization, civil servants must become proficient in technological tools, online service delivery and innovative administrative approaches. The OECD Digital Government Index (2020) associates professionalism with digital capability and innovative governance²⁵. Although Vietnam has adopted a national digital transformation program since 2020, many civil servants still lack essential competencies such as data analytics for policy formulation, showing a noticeable disparity from international standards.

A third requirement involves ethical integrity in the global context. Integration requires civil servants to adhere to consistent ethical norms and operate within robust accountability frameworks. Vietnam's score of 41/100 in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2023), ranking 81 among one hundred eighty countries, demonstrates improvement but also signals persistent vulnerabilities²⁶. Ethical governance thus demands transparency in asset declaration and effective mechanisms to control conflicts of interest, in line with practices in countries such as Singapore and South Korea, whose integrity frameworks influence Vietnam's implementation of the Law on Anti-Corruption 2018.

The fourth requirement concerns international working capacity and a global citizen mindset. As interactions with foreign partners, international organizations and FDI enterprises increase, civil servants require functional English proficiency, intercultural communication skills and the ability to collaborate across borders. However, "In reality, the foreign language proficiency of officials and civil servants in administrative agencies still reveals many limitations and weaknesses, failing to meet the requirements of their jobs"²⁷.

<https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=200766> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

²² GOVERNMENT. "Decree No. 138/2020/ND-CP of the Government: Regulations on recruitment, employment and management of civil servants", 2020, Hanoi. Available at: <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=201778> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

²³ GOVERNMENT. "Decree No. 170/2025/ND-CP, regulating the recruitment, use and management of civil servants", 2025. Hanoi. Available at: <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=214323> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

²⁴ MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS. "Report No. 135/BC-BNV on the summary of the work of the Home Affairs sector for the period 2016-2020 and the deployment of tasks for 2021", 2021, Hanoi. Available at: <https://moha.gov.vn/van-ban/bao-cao-so-135bc-bnv-ngay-11012021-cua-bo-noi-vu-tong-ket-cong-tac-giai-doan-2016---2020-va-trien-khai-nhiem-vu-cong-tac-nam-2021-nganh-noi-vu---tbid1686> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

²⁵ OECD. "Multi-dimensional Review of Vietnam: Towards an Integrated, Transparent and Sustainable Economy, OECD Development Pathways", OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1787/367b585c-en>

²⁶ CENTRAL INTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION. "Corruption Perception Index 2023: Key Highlights". Available at: <https://noichinh.vn/tin-quoc-te/202402/chi-so-cam-nhan-tham-nhung-nam-2023-nhung-diem-noi-bat-313490/> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

²⁷ LAN, B. P. "Foreign language proficiency of leading and managerial civil servants in provincial and district-level administrative agencies of Southern provinces". Ministry-level scientific research project, 2024, Available at: <https://isos.gov.vn/quan-ly-hoat-dong-nghien-cuu-khoa-hoc/ngkiem-thu-de-tai-nang-luc-su-dung-ngoai-ngu-cua-cong-chuc-lanh->

The fifth requirement emphasises professionalism within international integration. Civil servants must combine technical excellence with an understanding of international law, foreign language capability, global administrative behavior and compliance with standards of transparency, efficiency and ethics. They must also possess the institutional capacity to engage in multilateral mechanisms, implement international commitments and respond effectively to transnational challenges.

Thus, new requirements for the professionalism of civil servants in the context of international integration need to be considered from a legal and administrative perspective, including: professional competence linked to the job position, digital and foreign language skills, ethical standards of public service, ability to comply with administrative procedures, and accountability. Requirements regarding political education and ideological orientation, although important in the Vietnamese public service system, are considered a specific group of legal obligations linked to the institutional model, rather than a universal criterion for evaluating the professionalism of the public service according to international standards.

2.4. Civil servant recruitment mechanism and legal principles ensuring professionalism

According to the Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15 of the National Assembly),²⁸ civil servant recruitment is established as a central legal institution to ensure the quality and professionalism of the public service. Legally, recruitment is not simply a personnel management activity, but a mechanism for implementing constitutional and legal principles on equality, competition, and the appreciation of competence in accessing public service.

Firstly, regarding the recruitment mechanism, current law stipulates that civil servant recruitment is mainly through competitive examinations or selection processes, based on job positions, rank standards, and the requirements of the employing agency. This approach represents a shift from a recruitment model based on formal staffing and qualifications to one linked to job positions and performance capabilities, thereby creating a legal basis for selecting individuals who truly meet the requirements of public service. However, the effectiveness of this mechanism largely depends on the degree of specificity of recruitment criteria and transparency in implementation.

Secondly, regarding the principle of equality and competition, the Law on Civil Servants affirms that all citizens who meet the prescribed conditions have the right to participate in the recruitment of civil servants. This principle has significant legal implications, aiming to prevent arbitrariness, favoritism, or closed access to public service, while ensuring that civil servant recruitment is an open, transparent, and controllable process. When the principle of competition is not fully ensured in practice, the professionalism of the public service will be diminished right from the initial stage.

Thirdly, the principle of competency-based recruitment plays a crucial role in building a professional civil servant workforce. Legally, this principle requires that candidate evaluation be based on their ability to perform official duties, rather than solely on qualifications, seniority, or non-specialized factors. However, if the competency assessment criteria are not standardized or remain merely formalistic, recruitment will struggle to fully perform its function of screening and ensuring the quality of civil servants.

dao-quan-ly-co-quan-hanh-chinh-cap-tinh-cap-huyen-cac-tinh-nam-bo-43463.html (accessed on 12 August 2025).

²⁸ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)". 2025. Ibid.

Thus, from an administrative law perspective, civil servant recruitment is not only the initial step in the public service management process, but also the fundamental legal mechanism that determines the level of professionalism of the entire civil service system in the future. Ensuring the principles of equality, competition, and competency-based recruitment are prerequisites for other standards of professionalism, such as efficiency, integrity, and accountability, to be realized in practice.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Qualitative research method

Qualitative methods were applied to elucidate the notion of “professionalism” among civil servants within public administration, enabling an analysis of its conceptual dimensions, structural features and determinants in the context of international integration. Through this interpretative approach, the study constructed a system of criteria and measurable indicators that later informed the development of the quantitative survey. It also contributed to refining the theoretical model and establishing an assessment framework suited to Vietnam’s administrative environment, particularly in relation to intangible factors such as organizational culture, administrative psychology and ethical norms in public service.

The research also relied on a systematic analysis of legal and policy documents, including the Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2008 (as amended in 2019, Law No. 52/2019/QH14)²⁹, Decree No. 90/2020/ND-CP³⁰, the Law on Anti-Corruption 2018³¹, Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2025 (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)³², Decree No. 170/2025/ND-CP³³ and key Party resolutions and national programs on administrative reform. This method enabled the identification of formal standards governing civil servant qualifications, ethics and performance evaluation. Moreover, the review of normative texts clarified the legal foundations of professionalism, highlighted the evolution of State management principles and underscored the institutional requirements that shape competency frameworks for civil servants in the current integration period.

3.2. Quantitative research methodology

The quantitative approach was employed to pursue three overarching purposes: first, to measure the degree of professionalism exhibited by Vietnamese civil servants based on clearly established criteria; second, to examine the underlying factors that influence professionalism in real administrative practice; and third, to verify preliminary propositions generated during the qualitative research phase. To fulfil these aims, a survey was administered to 175 respondents, including civil servants and managerial officials working in ministries, central bodies and local administrative units representing the northern, central and southern regions of Vietnam (Specifically, 53 central government officials and 122 local government officials). This sample was selected to provide an exploratory and indicative overview of perceived trends in civil servant professionalism across different

²⁹ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. “Law on Civil Servants, amended and supplemented (Law No. 52/2019/QH14)”. 2019. Ibid.

³⁰ GOVERNMENT. “Decree No. 90/2020/ND-CP on assessment and classification of the quality of cadres, civil servants and public employees”. 2020. Ibid.

³¹ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. “Law on Anti-Corruption (Law No. 36/2018/QH14)”. 2018. Ibid.

³² NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. “Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)”. 2025. Ibid.

³³ GOVERNMENT. “Decree No. 170/2025/ND-CP, regulating the recruitment, use and management of civil servants”. 2025. Ibid.

administrative levels and regions, rather than to achieve statistical representativeness. The survey instrument was a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale (1=unprofessional/no impact, 5=highly professional/high impact). The questionnaire comprised two major parts: the first assessed the current state of civil servant professionalism; the second identified the primary factors diminishing or hindering professionalism in the public sector environment.

Data Processing and Analysis: Upon completion of data collection, the research team analyzed the responses using descriptive statistics such as frequency, %age, and mean scores. Mean scores were calculated using Formula (1):

$$X = (\sum(X_i \times K_i))/n \quad (1)$$

where X denotes the weighted mean value; X_i represents the Likert scale score (ranging from 1 to 5); K_i refers to the number of respondents selecting each corresponding score X_i ; and $n = 175$ represents the total number of valid responses. This calculation enabled the identification of overall trends and the relative impact levels of the examined factors.

Additionally, based on the standard 0.8 interval for the five-point Likert scale, the results were categorized into five levels: "unprofessional/no impact" (1.00–1.79), "slightly professional/slight impact" (1.80–2.59), "average" (2.60–3.39), "fairly professional/significant impact" (3.40–4.19), and "highly professional/high impact" (4.20–5.00). This approach supports a systematic quantitative assessment of civil servant professionalism.

Reliability and Bias Considerations: Given the exploratory and descriptive orientation of this study, the questionnaire was designed to capture perceived trends rather than to construct a latent psychometric scale. Accordingly, Cronbach's alpha was not applied, as the items do not constitute a single unidimensional construct but represent distinct aspects of civil servant professionalism. This approach is consistent with descriptive policy-oriented studies that use Likert-type items for trend identification rather than scale validation. Accordingly, the quantitative findings are interpreted as analytically informative rather than statistically generalizable, and are used to complement legal analysis and policy discussion.

To mitigate social desirability bias, the survey was conducted on an anonymous and voluntary basis, without collecting personal identifiers or performance-linked information. Respondents were informed that the data would be used exclusively for academic research purposes. Nevertheless, the study acknowledges that perceptions of professionalism and ethics may still be influenced by contextual and psychological factors. Therefore, the quantitative results are interpreted as indicative rather than representative and are triangulated with qualitative legal analysis and secondary data.

Advantages of the Quantitative Method: The quantitative approach generated data that were explicit, objective and grounded in scientific measurement, making it possible to assess the professionalism of civil servants based on a system of predefined indicators. This method also enabled the identification of how strongly different factors influence professionalism, thereby supporting comparative analysis across criteria and respondent groups. Such empirical evidence strengthened the credibility and argumentative force of subsequent policy recommendations.

Limitations: Despite achieving relative representativeness, the sample size of 175 respondents remains too modest to support broad generalizations for the entire national civil service. Moreover, several components of professionalism, such as administrative psychology, ethical conduct, or organizational culture, are inherently qualitative and therefore challenging to translate into numerical scales. The accuracy of responses may be influenced by the psychological state of participants or the survey context, especially in situations where anonymity and transparency mechanisms are not fully ensured.

4. Research results and discussion

4.1. Overview of the civil servant workforce and their professionalism

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Report No. 135/BC BNV dated January 11, 2021³⁴, which reviews the performance of the home affairs sector for the 2016–2020 period and identifies tasks for 2021, the national workforce of public officials and civil servants in 2021 totaled 535,528 individuals. Within this figure, staffing positions allocated to state administrative agencies amounted to 247,344, including 106,836 positions in ministries and central agencies and 140,508 positions in local administrative units. Public service personnel numbered 1,783,174, of whom 116,698 worked in central-level units and 1,666,476 in local-level service institutions. Commune-level officials and civil servants comprised 226,210 persons, while part-time workers numbered 171,894 at the commune level and 633,747 at the village or neighborhood level. In terms of qualifications, 2,209 civil servants held doctoral degrees (0.4%), 19,666 possessed master's degrees (3.7%), and 278,198 held bachelor's degrees (51.9%). Additionally, 251,110 individuals (46.9%) had undergone political theory training³⁵.

Government Report No. 128/BC-CP dated April 19, 2021³⁶, evaluating the overall administrative reform program for 2011–2020 and orienting priorities for 2021–2030, also recorded that commune-level officials and civil servants numbered 226,210. Part-time personnel included 171,894 individuals at the commune level and 633,747 at the village or residential cluster level. The report noted significant improvements in qualifications: 53,974 commune-level officials possessed university degrees or higher (24.8%), and 103,902 had received state management training (47.8%). Nonetheless, 63,557 officials and civil servants had not received formal professional training (11.9%). Highly qualified personnel remained concentrated in centrally governed cities and major urban centers. A total of 282,561 officials and civil servants (52.8%) had not undergone political theory training, while 163,293 commune-level officials (75.2%) held educational levels below university, and 113,365 individuals (52.2%) lacked public administration training³⁷.

These statistics reveal marked disparities between urban and non-urban areas, underscoring the observation that personnel with higher qualifications are “mainly concentrated in large urban areas.” This uneven distribution produces significant disadvantages for rural, mountainous and remote regions in terms of access to quality public services and effective policy implementation. The imbalance in both the quantity and quality of personnel constitutes a substantial barrier to administrative reform, particularly in realizing the objectives of the 2021–2030 reform program. A civil service workforce deficient in professional expertise and political theory training will face considerable challenges in meeting the demands of

³⁴ MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS. “Report No. 135/BC-BNV on the summary of the work of the Home Affairs sector for the period 2016-2020 and the deployment of tasks for 2021”. 2021. Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ GOVERNMENT. “Report No. 128/BC-CP on the summary of the overall program of state administrative reform for the period 2011-2020 and orientations for the period 2021-2030”, 2021, Hanoi. Available at: <https://datafiles.chinhphu.vn/cpp/files/vbpq/2021/04/128.signed.pdf> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

³⁷ GOVERNMENT. “Resolution No. 76/NQ-CP promulgating the overall program of state administrative reform for the period 2021-2030”. 2021. Ibid.

a digital economy, a modern administrative system and the development of e-government³⁸.

4.2. Current status of civil servant professionalism

As examined earlier, the term “professionalism” in the civil service refers to a constellation of attributes encompassing formal qualifications, competencies in performing public duties, ethical standards, and a commitment to serving society. A professionalized civil service typically rests upon merit-based recruitment, systematic training, objective evaluations and operations conducted within a transparent and integrity-oriented institutional environment³⁹. Within the broader trajectory of administrative reform and the ongoing digital transformation, civil service professionalism in Vietnam is not merely a matter of technical governance, but a foundational determinant of state capacity, administrative effectiveness and public trust.

Nevertheless, Vietnam continues to encounter persistent manifestations of authoritarian behavior, bureaucratic obstruction, corruption, bribery and violations of public service discipline. These issues inhibit civil servants from exercising creativity or proposing initiatives essential for administrative reform and improvements in workforce quality⁴⁰. Underlying causes include personnel policies that do not sufficiently motivate civil servants: recruitment and placement practices that fail to match individual capabilities or training; the limited use of job performance as a basis for assignment; and the absence of institutional safeguards for competent, dynamic and reform minded officials who are willing to think independently, accept responsibility and take decisive action for the public interest. Inspection activities in certain jurisdictions remain irregular and unfocused, while supervisory mechanisms are narrow in scope and do not yield substantive results.

These structural weaknesses continue to appear in various forms, constraining innovation and weakening accountability within the public sector. Problems such as poorly aligned personnel management systems, inadequate career incentives, non-meritocratic recruitment and deployment, and insufficient protections for capable officials collectively undermine institutional integrity⁴¹. In addition, existing inspection and supervision systems lack the rigor and breadth required to reinforce administrative discipline.

To provide additional empirical insight into the condition of civil service professionalism, this study surveyed with 175 respondents comprising civil servants and administrative managers from ministries and local agencies across the country. The classification criteria applied in the analysis are shown in Table 1, and computations follow Formula (1). The results are presented below:

³⁸ DUCHO, H., NGOCPHAM, T., HONGVU, V. “Responsibility For Disciplining Civil Servants: A Comparison Between China’s Law And Vietnam’s Law”, *Journal of Ecohumanism*, v. 3, n. 3, 2024, p. 399–412. <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i3.3367>

³⁹ OECD. “Governing with Artificial Intelligence: The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions”, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1787/795de142-en>

⁴⁰ DUNG, N. D., & DUUY, N. D. “Civil servants in state administration meet the requirements of sustainable development in Vietnam today”, *Vietnam Lawyers Electronic Magazine*, 2025. Available at: <https://lsvn.vn/cong-chuc-trong-quan-tri-nha-nuoc-dap-ung-yeu-cau-cua-phat-trien-ben-vung-o-viet-nam-hien-nay-a155172.html> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁴¹ BOUCKAERT, G. “Which future for the public sector?”. In G. Bouckaert, A. Hondegheem, T. Steen, & S. Van de Walle (Eds.), *Futures for the public sector*, Leuven University Press, 2025. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/99163/1/9789461666246.pdf> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

Table 1. Professionalism of the vietnamese civil service.

Order	Issue	Survey subjects	Number (people)	1	2	3	4	5	Average score
1	Professional competence and ability to update interdisciplinary knowledge	Central-level Civil Service	53	4	10	17	14	8	3.11
		Local-level Civil Service	122	8	18	40	36	20	3.12
2	Digital administrative skills and the ability to adapt to digital transformation	Central-level Civil Service	53	6	11	15	14	7	3.04
		Local-level Civil Service	122	10	20	38	34	20	3.07
3	Ethical qualities and integrity in the context of globalization	Central-level Civil Service	53	7	13	17	11	5	2.93
		Local-level Civil Service	122	13	23	36	32	18	2.94
4	Ability to work in an international environment, thinking of serving global citizens	Central-level Civil Service	53	3	9	15	17	9	3.24
		Local-level Civil Service	122	6	14	30	45	27	3.17
5	International integration and requirements for professionalism	Central-level Civil Service	53	2	8	12	18	13	3.38
		Local-level Civil Service	122	5	11	28	48	30	3.18

Note: Scores are calculated based on Formula (1) using a 5-point Likert scale (n = 175).

Survey results in Table 1 reveal that: the overall assessment scores range from 2.93 to 3.38, indicating that the professionalism level of civil servants is at a fairly average level. Among the evaluated criteria, those related to professional competence, integration-oriented thinking, and the ability to work in an international environment received higher ratings than factors such as public service ethics, integrity, and digital adaptability. This demonstrates a noticeable disparity between technical skills global mindset and administrative ethics–digital governance capacity among current Vietnamese civil servants. The survey results indicate that the professionalism of Vietnamese civil servants should be assessed primarily based on indicators of performance capacity, transparency, efficiency, and accountability. The data analysis does not aim to evaluate the extent to which political and ideological requirements are met, but rather focuses on the constituent elements of professionalism in the administrative and legal sense. A breakdown of each criterion reveals: (1) The criterion "Professional competence and ability to update interdisciplinary knowledge" received an average score of 3.11 (for central government officials) and 3.12 (for local government officials), indicating that civil servants have a relatively solid professional foundation. However, the ability to acquire and update interdisciplinary knowledge in fields such as economics, law, and technology remains limited. This is reflected in the high%age of 42 people who rated this criterion as weak or average, while only 28 people rated it as "very professional" (level 5). The research results show the need to strengthen the development of interdisciplinary competence for civil servants. Current legislation clearly stipulates the responsibilities of civil servants in training and professional

development (Article 29 of the 2025 Civil Servant Law) but lacks an effective mechanism for monitoring the updating of interdisciplinary knowledge. Regulations requiring "multidisciplinary competence certificates" in the periodic evaluation of civil servants should be added. (2) "Digital governance skills and adaptability to digital transformation" received the lowest average scores (3.04 and 3.07), clearly reflecting the difficulties civil servants face in accessing and implementing digital governance. Notably, 47 respondents (26.86%) rated this criterion at level 1 or 2, indicating a relatively widespread lack of preparation. A segment of civil servants still lacks basic technological skills, data processing capabilities, and the ability to interact through digital platforms. This result underscores the urgent need for mandatory digital competency training policies to meet the requirements of modern public administration in the digital age. (3) "Ethics and integrity in public service in the context of globalization" received the lowest average scores (2.93 and 2.94) among the five criteria surveyed. This result raises concerns about the decline in professional ethics, manifested through self-serving behavior, irresponsibility, or abuse of power in the context of increasingly deep international integration. As many as 56 respondents (32.00%) rated this criterion at 1-2, while only 16.13% rated it at 5. This disparity shows that ethics and integrity in public service remain weaknesses that need to be addressed through strengthened power control, transparency, and more rigorous enforcement of civil servant discipline. This is one of the lowest scores, reflecting concerns about public service ethics. This indicates a gap between legal regulations and practical behavior. According to Article 12, Clause 1 of the 2025 Law on Civil Servants, "civil servants must have impeccable and exemplary ethics." However, the lack of sanctions and monitoring tools (such as digital ethics and 360-degree feedback) makes ensuring integrity ineffective. (4) "Ability to work in an international environment and global citizenship thinking" scored an average scores (3,27 and 3,17), and, second highest among all surveyed aspects, shows a positive trend in improving the integration capacity of civil servants. In particular, 37 respondents (21.14%) rated this criterion at level 5, reflecting a significant improvement in international communication skills, multicultural understanding, and global thinking. This result is largely due to young civil servants having good foreign language skills and educational qualifications. This forms an important foundation for building a civil servant workforce that meets the needs of global public administration. (5) "International integration and professional standards requirements" achieved the highest average scores (3.38 and 3.18 across all surveyed criteria, indicating that civil servants have a clearer understanding of the importance of professionalism in the context of globalization. With 43 respondents (approximately 24.57%) rating this criterion at level 5, the data reflects a positive shift in thinking about public service, especially regarding behavioral standards, professional expertise, and adaptability to international practices. These results provide a favorable foundation for implementing modern, transparent, and efficient management models that conform to international standards within the Vietnamese civil service system. Article 7, Clause 4 of the 2025 Law on Cadres and Civil Servants defines "professionalism" as a principle for organizing public service activities⁴², but there is no index system to regularly measure and monitor professionalism in practice.

4.3. Causes of certain limitations in civil servant professionalism

To further clarify the underlying causes of professionalism-related limitations among civil servants, this study surveyed 175 individuals, including civil servants and their managers, across various ministries and local departments nationwide.

⁴² NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)". 2025. Ibid.

Classification rules are presented in Table 2 and calculated using Formula (1). The results are as follows:

Table 2. Causes of limitations in civil servant professionalism.

Order	Cause	Survey subjects	Number (people)	1	2	3	4	5	Average score
1	Lack of an objective performance evaluation mechanism	Central-level Civil Service	53	5	6	12	20	10	3.32
		Local-level Civil Service	122	5	9	31	50	27	3.43
2	The quality of training and development of civil servants has not met the reality	Central-level Civil Service	53	6	8	15	17	7	3.21
		Local-level Civil Service	122	7	11	33	47	24	3.38
3	Recruitment is still formal, not really based on capacity	Central-level Civil Service	53	7	10	16	15	5	3.02
		Local-level Civil Service	122	8	14	35	45	20	3.20
4	Lack of a working environment that encourages innovation and creativity	Central-level Civil Service	53	6	9	15	18	5	3.13
		Local-level Civil Service	122	6	13	33	47	23	3.36
5	There is no effective system to monitor and handle violations of public ethics	Central-level Civil Service	53	5	8	13	19	8	3.32
		Local-level Civil Service	122	6	11	31	49	25	3.41
6	The impact of the mentality of complacency and fear of change among civil servants	Central-level Civil Service	53	6	11	14	17	5	3.08
		Local-level Civil Service	122	5	10	29	51	27	3.40

Note: Scores are calculated based on Formula (1) using a 5-point Likert scale (n = 175).

The survey results in Table 2 show that the average scores ranged from 3.08 to 3.43, reflecting that the causes considered were rated as "important" by the respondents. The survey results reflect the subjective level of awareness and evaluation of the surveyed group of civil servants, and do not fully reflect the systemic and universal severity of the issue across the entire civil service. However, when placing the survey results in relation to the current legal framework,

significant gaps can be identified between legal standards and practical implementation, directly impacting the professionalism of the civil servant workforce. Specifically:

(1) The factor "lack of objective mechanisms for evaluating work performance" received the highest average score (3.32 and 3.43). From a legal perspective, this result shows that although the law has stipulated the obligation to periodically evaluate civil servants, especially according to Decree No. 90/2020/ND-CP⁴³, the current evaluation mechanism still lacks clear quantitative criteria linked to specific positions and results. Over-reliance on subjective judgments and formal procedures reduces the legal function of evaluation, which is designed as a tool to classify responsibility, serving as a basis for rewards and disciplinary actions. Article 25 of the 2025 Law on Cadres and Civil Servants stipulates the principles, authority, methods and content of civil servant evaluation, emphasizing "level of task completion" and "quality and progress of work". However, in reality, many agencies still conduct evaluations in a formalistic manner, lacking specific key performance indicators (KPIs), affecting motivation and competitiveness in public service. This context necessitates the issuance of a results-based evaluation framework, assigning responsibility to heads of agencies, and integrating digital technology into civil servant evaluations.

(2) The factor "training and development programs do not meet practical requirements," with average scores (3.21 and 3.28), reflects the discrepancy between the legal obligation to train civil servants and the actual effectiveness of this activity. Data from the Ministry of Interior in 2022 shows that 68% of surveyed civil servants stated they could not apply the knowledge they learned to their daily work. This underscores the need to reconsider the alignment between legally mandated training and the competency requirements of each job position.

(3) The issue of "recruitment being merely a formality and not truly based on the principle of valuing talent" received an average score of 3.24, indicating a risk of undermining the effectiveness of legal principles on transparency, competition, and equality in access to public services. Article 9 of Decree 170/2025/ND-CP stipulates the principle of recruitment as "competitive, open, and transparent,"⁴⁴ through competitive examinations. However, some units still abuse the selection or allocation method "based on quotas," not based on actual capabilities. Digital technology has not been integrated to ensure fairness in recruitment. The mismatch between the placement of civil servants and their expertise from the outset not only affects work efficiency but also weakens the legal significance of the recruitment system as an institution ensuring professionalism and fairness in state management.

(4) The factor "lack of a work environment that encourages innovation and creativity," with average scores (3.13 and 3.36), reflects the tension between the requirement to comply with laws and administrative procedures and the need for innovation in state management. The 2025 Law on Public Officials emphasizes the role of public service ethics and administrative reform, but lacks specific provisions on encouraging innovation. From a legal perspective, this issue does not negate the principle of the rule of law, but raises questions about the degree of flexibility that the law allows in the performance of public duties, as well as the lack of legal mechanisms to protect public officials when implementing initiatives within their assigned authority.

(5) The assessment related to "lack of effective mechanisms to monitor and handle violations of public service ethics," with average scores (3.08 to 3.41),

⁴³ GOVERNMENT. "Decree No. 90/2020/ND-CP on assessment and classification of the quality of cadres, civil servants and public employees". 2020. Ibid.

⁴⁴ GOVERNMENT. "Decree No. 170/2025/ND-CP, regulating the recruitment, use and management of civil servants". 2025. Ibid.

shows the gap between the legal framework for anti-corruption and the effectiveness of its implementation in practice. Although the legal system has established relatively comprehensive regulations on supervision, discipline, and handling of violations, uneven application and a lack of deterrent effect have weakened the function of ensuring administrative discipline of these norms. However, because the survey data only reflects the general perceptions of respondents, it is insufficient to assess the specific level of violations or the legal responsibility of each agency or individual.

While the survey results do not reveal a comprehensive weakness of the Vietnamese public sector, they provide an initial empirical basis for identifying areas where laws and enforcement mechanisms have not been as effective as expected. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the survey data have provided impetus for more in-depth legal analysis and more detailed legal assessments of specific areas of the public sector.

4.4. Some issues for further discussion

Vietnam has increasingly strengthened its position within the international community through deeper engagement with global institutions, particularly through its enhanced cooperation framework with the OECD, as well as the implementation of several next-generation free trade agreements, notably the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), which entered into force in 2020. These agreements contain commitments extending beyond trade, investment and intellectual property, requiring corresponding reforms in state governance and the restructuring of the civil service toward transparency, efficiency and professionalism. As emphasized by UNDP (2013), “the national public administration is a central factor in ensuring the implementation capacity of integration commitments, promoting fairness, efficiency and competitiveness of the economy”⁴⁵. Within this setting, civil servants act not only as enforcers of the law but also as coordinators, negotiators and protectors of national interests in a complex global environment.

In parallel with this deepening integration, strengthening civil service professionalism becomes both an urgent component of administrative reform and a decisive factor in meeting international obligations, enhancing national governance capability and reinforcing public confidence. Empirical assessments of professionalism in Vietnam reveal encouraging progress but also expose deficiencies that require systematic improvement.

First, regarding formal qualifications as a foundational element of professionalism, available statistics show that although education levels have improved, they remain inadequate for the demands of integration. Report No. 135/BC-BNV (2021) indicates that only 0.4% of civil servants hold doctoral qualifications, 3.7% hold master's degrees, while 51.9% possess bachelor's degrees. At the commune level, more than 75% of civil servants have an education below the undergraduate level⁴⁶. This imbalance is concerning, given that modern administrative governance requires civil servants to be capable of understanding domestic law while engaging with international legal standards governing trade, the environment, human rights and intellectual property. Without substantive knowledge, civil servants cannot effectively mediate between national law and global regulatory frameworks.

⁴⁵ UNDP. “Public Administration Reform and Anti-Corruption: A Series of Policy Discussion Papers”, 2013. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/vietnam/publications/public-administration-reform-and-anti-corruption-series-policy-discussion-papers> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁴⁶ MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS. “Report No. 135/BC-BNV on the summary of the work of the Home Affairs sector for the period 2016-2020 and the deployment of tasks for 2021”. 2021. Ibid.

Second, digital competence has become a core indicator of professionalism within the context of digital transformation and smart governance. Yet, the UNDP (2024) administrative reform assessment reports that more than 65% of civil servants have not received adequate training in essential digital skills, and only a small proportion can utilize data or analyze information systems to support government decision-making⁴⁷. The construction of e-government, the digitalization of administrative processes and the integration of AI into public services cannot be effectively implemented without a technologically proficient civil service.

Third, foreign language ability and a global policy mindset constitute another major limitation. In the contemporary global landscape, civil servants must increasingly work with international partners, foreign-invested enterprises, development agencies and cross-border issues. However, survey data from the Institute of State Organizational Sciences (2020) reveal that only about 20% of civil servants can use English in professional contexts, and only a very small number are familiar with the legal frameworks of WTO, CPTPP, EVFTA, or global environmental agreements⁴⁸. This illustrates a restricted capacity to engage in international cooperation and adapt to global policy shifts.

Fourth, with respect to public ethics and integrity, essential attributes of any modern civil service, multiple data sources point to persistent misconduct and irresponsible behavior. The Government Inspectorate (2020) reports that over 6,000 civil servants are disciplined annually⁴⁹. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2023) assigns Vietnam a score of 41/100, ranking eighty-third among one hundred eighty countries⁵⁰. These indicators reflect weaknesses in professional responsibility, ethical standards and public service culture, all of which are essential components of a professional civil service.

Comparative analysis with prior studies shows consistency while also extending academic insight. Dung & Duy (2025)⁵¹ writing in the *State Management Journal*, observed that although Vietnamese civil servants competently perform routine tasks, they "lack decision-making capacity, policy analysis skills and soft skills", a limitation further evidenced in this study through quantitative indicators such as digital literacy and administrative English proficiency. Similarly, Chien⁵² (2025) identified "bureaucratic inertia, conservatism and habitual work styles" as manifestations of unprofessional behavior, findings reinforced when contrasted with civil service systems like those of Singapore or South Korea, where civil servants

⁴⁷ UNDP. "Human Development Report 2023-24", 2024. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2023-24> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁴⁸ TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL. "Corruption Perceptions Index", 2023. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁴⁹ CENTRAL INTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. "Anti-corruption work in 2020 continued to be maintained, strengthened and achieved fairly comprehensive results," 2021. Available at: <https://noichinh.vn/nghien-cuu-trao-doi/202101/cong-tac-phong-chong-tham-nhung-nam-2020-tiep-tuc-duoc-duy-tri-day-manh-va-dat-ket-qua-kha-toan-dien-309076/> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁵⁰ PHUONG, H. "Corruption Perception Index 2023: Highlights," *Inspection Newspaper*, 2024. Available at: <https://thanhtra.com.vn/tin-quoc-te-164A88425/chi-so-cam-nhan-tham-nhung-nam-2023-nhung-diem-noi-bat-6696FF6D.html> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁵¹ DUNG, N. D., & DUUY, N. D. "Civil servants in state administration meet the requirements of sustainable development in Vietnam today". 2025. *Ibid*.

⁵² CHIEN, N. B. "Innovation in training and fostering cadres, civil servants and public employees to meet the requirements of modern and effective national governance", *Journal of State Management online*, 2025. Available at: <https://www.quanlynhanuoc.vn/2025/03/25/doi-moi-cong-tac-dao-tao-boi-duong-can-bo-cong-chuc-vien-chuc-dap-ung-yeu-cau-quan-tri-quoc-gia-hien-dai-hieu-qua/> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

undergo regular competency assessments, are evaluated against explicit KPIs and face dismissal for failure to meet performance standards.

From an international perspective, the UNDP (2013) report *People-Centered Civil Service Reform in Vietnam* asserted: "Vietnamese civil servants are competent in routine tasks but underperform in strategic and innovation-based capacities"⁵³. This observation aligns closely with the preceding analysis, highlighting the lack of flexibility, innovation, and policy responsiveness as systemic weaknesses in Vietnam's civil service. Additionally, the OECD (2023&2025)^{54,55} emphasized that a professional civil servant in the digital age is not merely a rule follower, but a creative problem-solver capable of leveraging technology and interdisciplinary thinking to address public issues, an ability still underdeveloped among Vietnamese civil servants.

From the combined analysis of survey findings and comparative legal-policy literature, it can be observed that while the current level of civil servant professionalism in Vietnam is assessed as average based on internal indicators, significant gaps remain when these results are placed in relation to normative standards and best practices identified in advanced administrative systems. Identified limitations in qualifications, digital skills, integration capacity, and public ethics, as reflected in both survey results and secondary reports, suggest potential constraints on administrative effectiveness and may pose challenges for fulfilling international integration commitments and advancing a modern rule-of-law state. To overcome these limitations, Vietnam must implement a comprehensive set of measures: reform merit-based recruitment, develop an integration competency framework for civil servants, strengthen interdisciplinary and administrative English training, apply international ethical standards in civil service evaluations, and foster the development of the "digital civil servant" and the "global civil servant" model. This is not merely a matter of public personnel management, but a decisive national strategy in the era of deep and comprehensive global integration.

4.5. Some proposed solutions

In the context of deepening international integration and the urgent need to build a modern, transparent, and efficient administrative system, enhancing the professionalism of Vietnam's civil service has become a strategic imperative. It determines the effectiveness of state governance and the country's capacity to fulfill its international commitments. Professionalism, in this context, should not be narrowly defined as educational attainment or years of service but rather understood as a comprehensive combination of professional competence, public service ethics, modern administrative skills, global-mindedness, and adaptability to a global environment. Based on the analysis of current conditions and limitations identified in reports by the Ministry of Home Affairs (2021)⁵⁶, UNDP (2013&2024)^{57,58}, and OECD (2020&2025)^{59,60}, several concrete groups of solutions

⁵³ UNDP. "Public Administration Reform and Anti-Corruption: A Series of Policy Discussion Papers". 2013. Ibid.

⁵⁴ OECD. "Multi-dimensional Review of Vietnam: Towards an Integrated, Transparent and Sustainable Economy, OECD Development Pathways". 2020. Ibid.

⁵⁵ OECD. "Governing with Artificial Intelligence: The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions". 2025. Ibid.

⁵⁶ MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS. "Report No. 135/BC-BNV on the summary of the work of the Home Affairs sector for the period 2016-2020 and the deployment of tasks for 2021". 2021. Ibid.

⁵⁷ UNDP. "Public Administration Reform and Anti-Corruption: A Series of Policy Discussion Papers". 2013. Ibid.

⁵⁸ UNDP. "Human Development Report 2023-24". 2024. Ibid.

⁵⁹ OECD. "Multi-dimensional Review of Vietnam: Towards an Integrated, Transparent and Sustainable Economy, OECD Development Pathways". 2020. Ibid.

are proposed as follows:

4.5.1. Reforming recruitment and civil servant utilization mechanisms based on integration competence assessment

Reforming the recruitment mechanism is a groundbreaking requirement in the process of professionalizing the public service, because an unsuitable workforce will lead to negative effects throughout the entire value chain: from training and development to utilization and performance evaluation. According to Article 18 of the 2025 Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)⁶¹, the recruitment of civil servants must ensure the principles of openness, competition, transparency, objectivity, and legality. However, in reality, the current examination format still heavily emphasizes testing knowledge of administrative law or memorization skills, failing to measure the effectiveness of soft criteria such as critical thinking, problem-solving, or international communication skills – essential requirements in the context of integration.

Therefore, it is urgent to improve the content and methods of civil servant recruitment examinations, shifting from purely multiple-choice tests to a multi-dimensional competency assessment model, including: administrative problem-solving skills, digital literacy, innovative thinking, and administrative communication skills in English. This approach is not only consistent with Article 23 of the 2025 Law on Cadres and Civil Servants regarding recruitment based on job positions⁶², but also reflects the spirit of Decree No. 170/2025/ND-CP⁶³, which emphasizes the requirement to clearly define job title standards associated with each public service position, and the necessary competencies and qualities.

Competency-based recruitment models have been effectively implemented in many OECD countries such as South Korea, Singapore, and Germany. Vietnam can learn from the experiences of these countries but needs to adapt them to its institutional characteristics, resources, and internal needs. Specifically, instead of simply copying existing models, Vietnam should develop a civil servant competency framework based on job positions, codified in sub-legal documents and linked to entrance and promotion examinations.

In particular, civil servant positions related to international relations, trade, investment, environment, and digital transformation need specific standards that reflect in-depth expertise and interdisciplinary capabilities. Establishing a competency framework right from the recruitment stage will not only help accurately classify civil servants but also contribute to overcoming the current egalitarianism in job placement and promotion—a problem that has been highlighted in civil service performance evaluation reports at the ministerial and local levels.

Furthermore, standardizing the recruitment process needs to be closely linked to a system of inspection and supervision to ensure transparency, prevent corruption, and build public trust in the quality of the new civil servant workforce. In accordance with the spirit of Article 31 of the 2025 Law on Cadres and Civil Servants⁶⁴, all recruitment and appointment decisions must be linked to publicly available and strictly controlled competency profiles by competent authorities, with

⁶⁰ OECD. "Governing with Artificial Intelligence: The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions". 2025. Ibid.

⁶¹ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)". 2025. Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ GOVERNMENT. "Decree No. 170/2025/ND-CP, regulating the recruitment, use and management of civil servants". 2025. Ibid.

⁶⁴ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)". 2025. Ibid.

supervision from the Party organization and the People's Committee at the provincial and city levels.

4.5.2. Enhancing in-depth and continuous training aligned with integration competency standards

Numerous studies^{65,66} have shown that most civil servants receive only basic theoretical administrative training, with little access to updated specialized knowledge relevant to international contexts. It is thus necessary to establish periodic training programs, stratified by position and specialization, prioritizing:

Training in international law, integration commitments, administrative negotiation, and international dispute resolution; Training in digital skills, public data management, and AI applications in administration; Administrative English training (specialized legal English, WTO, CPTPP, EVFTA, etc.).

It is advisable to promote training models that integrate theory, practice, and simulation; invite international experts; and organize short-term courses at reputable global institutions. Simultaneously, a post-training assessment mechanism should be established to ensure that learning is applied effectively, avoiding the situation of "certification training only."

4.5.3. Building and developing a modern civil service culture that emphasizes ethics, integrity, and service spirit

A key manifestation of professionalism in modern public service is the public service ethics and social responsibility of civil servants. "According to statistics from the Ministry of Interior, in the first six months of 2024, 1,338 officials, civil servants, and public employees were disciplined, including 139 officials, 432 civil servants, and 767 public employees"⁶⁷. This figure reveals a significant gap in the mechanisms for controlling and fostering public service ethics in Vietnam today.

Therefore, the promulgation of a Code of Professional Ethics and Public Service Culture for civil servants in the context of international integration is an urgent requirement. This code should emphasize standards of transparency, accountability, conflict of interest prevention, as well as standards of conduct towards international organizations, FDI enterprises, and global citizens—entities increasingly present in the process of public service in modern Vietnam.

The 2025 Law on Cadres and Civil Servants, in Article 12, clearly stipulates that "Public officials must possess impeccable and exemplary ethics, practicing diligence, frugality, integrity, and impartiality in the performance of their duties"⁶⁸. Specifically, Article 13 of this Law requires public officials to "respect, listen to, and be close to the people; be serious and humble; use standard, clear, and coherent language in communication; and strictly prohibit arrogant, authoritarian, irresponsible behavior that causes difficulties and inconvenience to citizens and businesses when performing their duties." This is an important legal basis for building a transparent and fair system for evaluating public service ethics, based on actual conduct rather than just periodic evaluations.

⁶⁵ DUCHO, H., NGOCPHAM, T., & HONGVU, V. "Responsibility For Disciplining Civil Servants: A Comparison Between China's Law And Vietnam's Law". 2024. Ibid.

⁶⁶ KHANH, P. T. L. K. "Capacity of cadres and civil servants in building a professional, responsible and talented civil service in Vietnam", 2023. Ibid.

⁶⁷ BINH, N. "Across the country, 1,338 officials, civil servants, and public employees were disciplined in the first six months of the year," Saigon Liberation Newspaper. Available at: <https://www.sggp.org.vn/ca-nuoc-co-1338-can-bo-cong-chuc-vien-chuc-bi-ky-luat-trong-6-thang-dau-nam-post748252.html> (accessed on 11 August 2025).

⁶⁸ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. "Law on Cadres and Civil Servants (Law No. 80/2025/QH15)". 2025. Ibid.

In addition to the disciplinary sanctions system, it is necessary to establish mechanisms to promote and encourage public service ethics in a positive direction. Some possible proposals include: establishing a system of awards to honor exemplary civil servants in terms of ethics and social responsibility; publicly disclosing the results of professional ethics assessments in annual civil servant performance evaluation reports; and integrating ethical indicators into the performance evaluation system.

Building a modern public service culture should not be limited to legal regulations, but should be realized through practical behavior, the exemplary conduct of leaders, and a work environment that encourages innovation, transparency, and accountability. This aligns with the trend of modern public administration in OECD countries and is also an internal requirement for Vietnam to build a professional, capable, and ethical civil servant workforce to serve in the era of deep integration.

4.5.4. Strengthening international cooperation in training and civil servant exchange

An effective way to enhance the professionalism of civil servants is through direct exposure to international work environments. This includes immersing civil servants in diverse administrative cultures and governance systems, thereby significantly broadening their policy perspectives and managerial adaptability. Therefore, Vietnam should prioritize developing international cooperation mechanisms in civil servant training, particularly through signing bilateral and multilateral personnel exchange programs, as well as scholarship agreements with ASEAN member states, EU countries, and OECD partners. These initiatives not only provide access to world-class knowledge but also help Vietnamese civil servants integrate into dynamic global public administration networks.

In addition to academic exchanges, it is necessary to systematically encourage civil servants who have studied or worked at international organizations, foreign embassies, or advanced public agencies abroad to bring their international experience back to apply to domestic reforms. This can be achieved through state-led incentives, structured reintegration programs, and leadership development pathways that reward innovation and global thinking. Their cross-border insights can play a key role in bridging the governance gap, bringing Vietnam's public sector into line with international standards, and accelerating administrative modernization.

Furthermore, Vietnam should consider adopting a rotation mechanism between central and local government agencies, as well as between administrative bodies and research centers or international organizations. Such rotations can foster learning experiences, policy dissemination, and inter-sectoral adaptability, while cultivating a professional culture based on strategic vision, interdisciplinary capabilities, and global responsibility. A well-designed rotation program not only enhances individual capabilities but also contributes to the systemic development of Vietnam's civil service in line with international best practices.

4.5.7. Reforming salary and incentive systems to retain talented personnel

Professionalism cannot be discussed without adequate compensation. According to UNDP (2024)⁶⁹, a major reason for skilled civil servants leaving the public sector is the substantial income gap with the private and international sectors. Vietnam should thus accelerate salary reform based on job position, competence, and

⁶⁹ UNDP. "Human Development Report 2023-24". 2024. Ibid.

performance outcomes, avoiding the situation of “low pay for high performance, high pay for low performance”.

At the same time, it is essential to establish a transparent reward mechanism linked to public service performance indicators (KPIs) and provide special incentives for civil servants with high integration capabilities, international certifications, participation in international negotiations, or contributions to institutional reforms linked to global commitments.

5. Conclusion

Research on the professionalism of Vietnamese civil servants in the context of international integration has shown that, although Vietnam has made significant progress in administrative reform and the development of public sector human resources, the level of professionalism of civil servants still does not fully meet the requirements of the global integration process. Specifically, professional qualifications are uneven across levels, digital skills and administrative competence in English are limited, traditional administrative thinking still prevails, and public service ethics and a culture of responsibility have not yet approached international standards. These factors are major obstacles to the effective implementation of international commitments, administrative institutional reform, and the building of a modern, effective, and transparent public service.

The outstanding significance of the research lies in establishing the importance of the principle of administrative rule of law as the foundation for professionalizing public service in the context of integration. The study proposes an approach to enhancing professionalism through improving the institutional framework for recruitment, evaluation, training, discipline, and accountability – aspects that are legally codified, rather than simply changing individual administrative practices.

However, the study also has some limitations: Firstly, the number of respondents is small (175 people), and most of the data collected is based primarily on secondary reports; there is no large-scale empirical survey on the integration capacity of civil servants at various levels, sectors, and localities. Secondly, it does not delve deeply into analyzing the differences between central and local civil servants in the context of the merger under the two-tier model, or between specialized fields such as economics, law, and digital technology.

Based on these limitations, further research should focus on large-scale quantitative and qualitative surveys to assess professional indicators according to international standards (e.g., OECD, UNDP, ASEAN), while measuring the effectiveness of domestic and international training programs. In addition, in-depth research is needed on the “global civil servant” model and the impact of digital transformation on the structure and functions of Vietnam's civil service. These directions will be crucial for developing a strategic roadmap to enhance the professionalism of civil servants in the 2025-2035 period, aiming for a modern, efficient, and deeply integrated civil service.

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