

7 ICLLCE 2017-033 Do Thi Hang Ha

**Mismatching Of Literature Graduates And Creative Writing Industry In Vietnam:  
Causes And Solutions**

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**Abstract**

There are many questions for young people who love literature: How to become a writer? Can learning specialized literature help me become a writer? There is a simple truth: Not only specialized literature students necessarily become writers and writers don't always receive training in order to work in this field. In fact, there are many current graduates from such universities as the National Economics University, Banking Institute, Foreign Trade University, University of National Economics and Business of Vietnam National University who have chosen to be writers. Along with that, many literature bachelor students do side jobs. Statistics show that only 2% of the students in Literature classes at University of Social Sciences and Humanities work in the literature industry in such positions as researchers and writers, while 42% of them work in an industry not relevant to their majors. So, what is the purpose of learning literature and what may graduates do for the country's literature? This research points out the relation between study and market's demand and addresses issues related to the current situation of literary studies and writing. It uses statistical and analytical methods to explain the causes and the solutions to this problem.

*Keywords:* IJLLCE, Creative Writing, Learning & Teaching Literature, Executing, Demand

**Introduction**

How to create a team of qualified and enthusiastic writers contributing to the development of Vietnamese literature is always a question of literature academics. Since 1948, a lot of literature training courses have been organized in Vietnam and become a basis to nurture literary talents. Of the outstanding examples, we may mention Nguyen Du Writing School which was transformed into the Faculty of Literature Composing and Criticism before being renamed as Creative Writing and Journalism Department (in 4-2012) of Hanoi University of Culture; or the Faculty of Literature of Vietnam Synthetic University which was transformed into University of Social Sciences and Humanities. Lots of famous writers such as Dang Thai Mai, Truong Tuu, Hoang Xuan Nhi, and nearly 100 writers in Vietnam Writers' Association were trained in this school. However, in this modern time, this tradition seems to be eroded while most of famous contemporary young writers do not receive professional training.

**Objectives**

The research aims at pointing out reasons for Literature Bachelors' aberration in the modern literature world, the shortcomings of literature training in high schools and colleges and the relationship between the literature learners and writers. Based on those

problems, the research proposes solutions to empower literature students and facilitate them to be young professional writers.

### Research Questions

The research follows the statistics based on information from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, where provides the most well-known Literature course, and the top Vietnamese influential writers in the present day.

Table 1

*Occupation of students in Faculty of Literature K56 University of Social Sciences and Humanities*

Occupation	f	%
Do literature-related jobs (editor, journalist, teacher in literature, etc)	22	51.16
Do literature-unrelated jobs	17	41.86
Work in Literature Profession (writer or literature researcher)	1	2.32
Study higher or be unemployed	2	4.65

Table 2

*Top 10 influential writers in 2015 (by Labour Newspapers - 21/01/2016) (1)*

Name	Former Faculty – School
Nguyen Nhat Anh	Faculty of Literature, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy
Trang Ha	Faculty of Chinese, Hanoi University of Foreign Languages Pedagogy
Nguyen Phong Viet	Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology
Anh Khang	Faculty of Journalism and Communication, Hanoi University of Social Sciences and Humanities
Nguyen Ngoc Son (Son Paris)	Faculty of French, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam
Gao	Yen Hoa High School
Nguyen Ngoc Thach	Not formerly educated in Literature
Do Nhat Nam	Saint Paul High School, USA
Hamlet Truong	Faculty of Law, Da Lat University
Iris Cao	Singapore Institute of Management, Singapore

With the above statistics, the research mentions the following main issues:

1. The reason why only a small number of literature specialized graduates follows the career path to be a writer or literature researcher, meanwhile most of young writers are from unrelated majors.
2. Solutions for literature training in high schools and colleges

### Theory

The research is an enquiry into the background of Vietnam modern Literature. It is based on the socioeconomic theory which focuses on the effect of economic activity on social processes. In general it analyses how societies progress, stagnate, or regress because of their local or regional economy, or the global economy (Wikipedia).

From this theoretical framework, the research hypothesized that Literature teaching programs have not improved the creativity needed for writers. Having frequently worked

with literature, literature graduates' enthusiasm has been abraded, making them lose the passion in literary career. The era of market economy contributes to the decrease of literature's attractiveness. The overpopulated capacity of research institute is also an obstacle deterring the graduates from following their literary research activities. Moreover, the market offers jobs for workers in other sectors.

### Methodology

The research's methodologies require conducting statistics from Literature students and graduates, gathering data from the specified websites and compiling database in order to analyse the material and arrive at a more complete understanding of Vietnam Literature background.

### Data Collection

**Data from survey.** The predesigned questionnaires will be distributed to all students in the Faculty of Literature K56 of Social Sciences and Humanities through a social network platform. All responses will be saved by a built-in tool for later analysis.

**Document analysis.** The second source of data for this research originates from the review of previous researches and studies of similar topics. All related pieces of information will then be extracted and saved to a destination folder.

**Notes from semi-structured interviews.** In order to triangulate the data, the study utilises several semi-structured interviews and note-taking. The outcomes of this process will then be stored and extracted for further analyses.

### Data analysis

In order to emerge the meaning of collected data, several qualitative analysing techniques are utilised, including categorising, pair comparison, and meaning from patterns.

**Data categorising.** All collected data from the above three sources will be gathered; then categorised into groups based on similarities and research questions. This process results in a refined data and initial findings will emerge.

**Pair comparison.** After being categorised, the collected data will be compared pair by pair to justify initial findings emerged from the first stage. This process also reveals important patterns of collected data which brings in significant insights to the study.

**Meaning from patterns.** Taking the outcomes of the above two processes, revealed patterns will be analysed to figure out what the data really represents. The true meaning of collected data will then be redefined and crystalized. Findings from this process will generate key discussions which will be further taking into consideration.

### Literature Review

Literature is a term used to describe written and sometimes spoken materials. Derived from the Latin *litteratura* meaning "writing formed with letters," literature most commonly refers to works of the creative imagination, including poetry, drama, fiction, nonfiction, journalism, and in some instances, song.

About its definition, definitions of literature have varied over time; it is a "culturally relative definition". In Western Europe, prior to the eighteenth century, literature as a term indicated all books and writing. A more restricted sense of the term emerged during the Romantic period, in which it began to demarcate "imaginative" literature. Contemporary debates over what constitutes literature can be seen as returning to the older, more inclusive notion of what constitutes literature. Cultural studies, for instance, takes as its

subject of analysis both popular and minority genres, in addition to canonical works (Wikipedia).

For Vietnamese literature, many studies about its context were conducted. As demonstrated in the site of the Embassy of Vietnam in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the Kingdom of Sweden, the reliable and well-rounded source: "Vietnamese literature was developed at an early date. Despite the harsh trials of history in the form of repeated foreign invasion, its own characteristics remain. Vietnamese literature includes two major components which have developed simultaneously and are profoundly interrelated: Folk literature and written literature.

Vietnamese folk literature came into being very early and had a profound effect on the spiritual life of the Viet. The folk literature always praised beauty, humanism, and the love of goodness, and contributed to the formation of a national sense. Legends, fairy tales, humorous stories, folk songs, epics and so on have a tremendous vitality and have lived on today.

Written literature first appeared around the 10th century. It had a leading role and bore the main traits of Vietnamese literature. From the 10th century, literary works were written in Han (classical Chinese) and "chu nom". But since the 16th century, "chu nom" literature became increasingly popular, and held a prim position by the early 18th century. Well-known works written in "chu nom" included Chinh Phu Ngam by female poet Doan Thi Diem, the Kieu story by Nguyen Du, and chu nom poems of female poet Ho Xuan Huong. These works were the cream of Vietnamese literature. However entering the 20th century, works written in classical Chinese disappeared. In the 20's, and the following decades, the country's literature was written in Vietnamese "quoc ngu" (Romanized national language). In that period the country saw drastic changes in its socio-economic structure and cultural life and began to experience the far-reaching influence of Western culture. Vietnamese literature thereby developed quickly in terms of quantity, genre and form. Prominent in prose were Tat Den by Ngo Tat To, Bi Vo by Nguyen Hong, Buoc Duong Cung and short stories by Nguyen Cong Hoan, short stories by Nam Cao, Giong To and other novels by Vu Trong Phung. Poetry also developed vigorously, culminating in the new poetry movement with a generation of famous authors such as: The Lu, Pham Huy Thong, Xuan Dieu, Luu Trong Lu, Huy Can, To Huu to cite a few. From then on Vietnamese literature developed constantly, particularly during the two wars of resistance for national liberation. Many young authors emerged in the literary circles. Traditionally, Vietnamese literature always featured patriotism, national pride and humanism. It was not by chance that great cultural personalities such as Nguyen Trai, Nguyen Du and Ho Chi Minh were also humanists." (The website of Embassy of Vietnam in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the Kingdom of Sweden)

Since 19<sup>th</sup> century, Global Literature has had a severe transformation in many aspects. Along with the worrying decline of literature students over the world, Vietnam also has been obvious had the movements from human resources to writing methods. Vietnamese writers moved from literary scholars, intellectuals to literary specialized students and then to students from other professions. The existed writing methods were improved with elaboration and creativity and have been continuously transformed to fulfil the market needs. That transformation leads to serious unemployment of small existed literature students and helps students in other majors become the key writers nowadays.

The research focuses on analysing and figuring out solutions to that problem.

### Findings

The research figures out the following statistics:

#### 1. Employment demands

##### a. Employment demands of different fields

Table 3

8 groups of occupation having highest employment demands in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2016

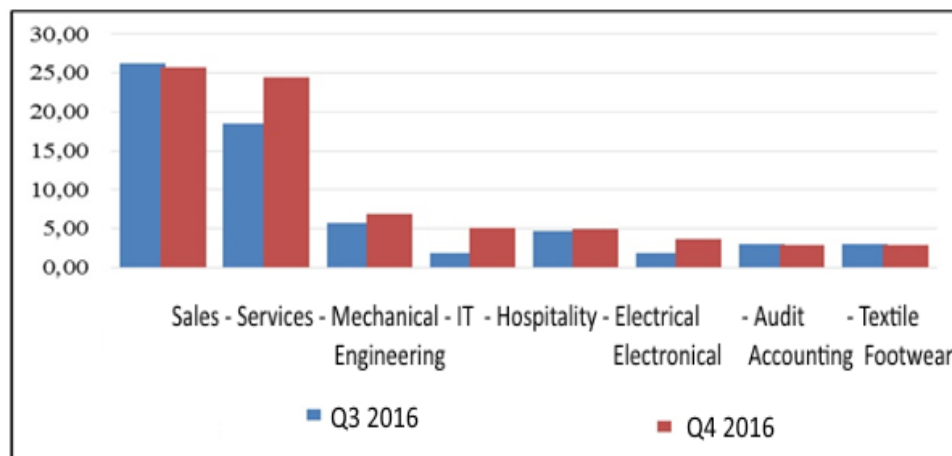


Table 4

*Employment Demands of popular occupations in Ho Chi Minh City in 2016*

Occupations	%
Communication – Advertising – Marketing	6,22
Service	16,93
Textiles – Footwear – Crafts	5,75
Management – Administration – Personnel	6,26
Architecture – Construction – Environment	1,78
Technology – Agri-forestry	1,29
Sciences – Society – Humanities	1,28
Others	2,99

Table 5

*Employment Demands in Hanoi in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2016*

Employment Demands	%
Vocational Schools	32.91
Colleges	35.30
Universities	20.66
Others	11.13

**b. Employment demands of Research Institutes**

Table 6

*Statistics from a survey on employment demands of Research Institutes in 2016*

Institutes	Number of Recruitment
Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences	17
Institute of Educational Research	4
Institute of Animal Sciences	49
Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences	14
Vietnam Atomic Energy Institute	19
Vietnam Institute of Literature	0

**2. Number of students in speciality A – B – C - D studying Literature**

Table 7

*Number of students in speciality A – B – C - D studying Literature*

Speciality	Main Subjects	%
A	Maths – Physics – Chemistry	6
B	Maths – Chemistry – Biology	3
C	Literature – History – Geography	71
D	Maths – Literature – English	20

(Speciality A, B, C, D are the divided specialities at the upper secondary school system in Vietnam)

The statistics show that:

- The occupational groups having high employment demands include Business, Sales, Service (in Ho Chi Minh City) and Mechanics – Manufacturing, IT – Software, Accounting – Auditing (in Hanoi). Meanwhile, Science – Society – Humanities has low demand (only 1.28% in Ho Chi Minh City). However, many students in other majors are still interested in literature and choose to become a writer. This means that literature still has its own attractiveness to Vietnamese youth.
- Recruitment demand of the Institute of Literature is much lower than other institutes.

Literature students in universities often studied Speciality C (specialize in 3 subjects: Literature – History – Geography) or Speciality D (specialize in 3 subjects: Maths – Literature – English) at upper secondary schools. Those specialities are mainly taught in theory with the lack of practical experiences. Thus, with the trend of pragmatic literary, students from other practical majors have more advantages. Besides, pragmatic literature is no longer favoured. Words and grammars used in modern literature have been simplified to express human daily life. That trend provides huge opportunities for unspecialized students and, on the other hand, takes away the chances of literature students who were always trained to smoothen every single sentence.

**3. Literature Interest**

It is a fact that nowadays fewer students are taking literature, both at the tertiary and the upper secondary level. This issue cause headaches to many literature teachers and heartened professors in the world. In Singapore, there are currently only about 3,000

students taking literature, compared to 16,970 in 1992 (Stacey, 2013). In America, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in what the academy considers core humanities disciplines (English language and literature, history, languages and literatures other than English, linguistics, classical studies, and philosophy) declined 8.7% from 2012 to 2014, falling to the smallest number of degrees conferred since 2003 -- 106,869 (Scott, 2016). In Vietnam, only 6% students applying to the Social Science and Humanity discipline in comparison with 6,2% in 2012 (Thao, 2013).

Many reasons were placed for that issue, but the main reasons should be the employment demands, literature interest and teaching methods.

In literature interest, there is the steady decline of literary reading of global readers. NEA surveys in America shows that 43% of adults in America read at least one work of literature in the previous year. "That's the lowest percentage in any year since those surveys began tracking reading and arts participation in 1982, when the literature reading rate was 57%" (Christopher, 2016). There's a general equivalence in many other countries when their number of readers have been significantly decreased.

### Literary reading is on the decline

% of American adults who read any work of literature – novels, short stories, poems, or plays in print or online – in the past year.



Source: National Endowment for the Arts

WAPO.ST/WONKBLOG

For literature interest of students who studied literature, Gary Saul Morson (2015) of North Western University said in his article "Why College Students Are Avoiding the Study of Literature": "I speak with students by the dozens, and none has ever told me that he or she does not take more literature courses because every moment at school must be devoted to maximizing future income. On the contrary, students respond by describing some literature course they took that left them thinking they had nothing to gain from repeating the experience. And when I hear their descriptions of these classes, I see their point".

To explain "why College Students Are Avoiding the Study of Literature", Gary Saul Morson (2015) continuously answered: "because we (mostly college instructors, but also high school English teachers) teach it badly".

Related to teaching and learning issue, many Vietnamese teachers and professors agree with this speech. Assoc. PhD – Writer Van Gia said: "It is unable for students to choose the curriculum at the beginning, so they have to study general existed subjects. Several unnecessary subjects are taught while many important ones are not mentioned in the training courses. For example, such subjects as the Government and Law or General Psychology definitely are not practical, while necessary subjects including Ethnology,

Psychology in creative art or Specialized Arts, and such are not taught” (To nurture and empower literary talent in modern time, 2012). Therefore, Literature training programs in Universities clearly needs to be improved. The Presentation “Assessment of teaching Literature situation in high schools and Proposals of innovative solutions for new teaching and assessment methods in order to improve teaching quality” conducted by Literary Group, Nguyen Hien Secondary School in Nha Trang (2012) mentions a situation that: “Although teachers have consciousness of teaching method innovation, the implementation is still formalistic and has not resulted in expected results. Some teachers are too familiar with one-way method of communication that does not involve significant audience participation but relies upon passive learning. Students have nothing to do except listening, memorizing and repeating exactly what the teachers said. Those teachers provide knowledge by imposing their experiences, feelings and opinions on students. Besides, there are some teachers who neither pay attention to the way their students acquire and apply knowledge nor help them do that positively and initiatively. A lesson is usually conducted as a presentation or a speech. In addition, the teachers are so afraid of not completing their lesson plans on time that they answer the questions asked by students instead of waiting them giving their own opinions”. This situation may constrict students’ enthusiasm and passion in this profession.

Studying and writing literature, especially becoming a writer, are totally different. A successful writer must have his own literary talent, practical experiences and great creativity. Therefore, to be a writer, literature students have to strengthen their writing skills, enhance their imagination, creativity and experiences. Writing a story is not the same as analysing a story. However, Literature teaching curriculum in universities mainly focuses on literary criticism and research. There is no subject relating to creative writing. Those lead to the under qualified literature graduates and may be the underlying reasons for Literature Bachelors’ aberration in the modern literature world.

### Discussion

#### Limitation

- There are above 40 students in Literature Faculty of Hanoi University of Social Sciences and Humanities taking part in the research’s survey. We aim at having larger and more objective statistics for further research.
- Information is collected mostly from interviews, surveys and the Internet.

#### Recommendations

The research indicates the issues of Vietnam modern Literature, including the transformation in the mainstream composing force, the fall of Literature profession in the market economy and the problem in teaching and learning Literature. According to “Occupation of students in Faculty of Literature K56 University of Social Science and Humanities” (Table 1), only 2% of the students work in the literature industry in such positions as researchers and writers, while 42% of them work in an industry not relevant to their majors. This is an alarming fact showing that the government provides subsidies and human resources to the Faculty of Literature each year to train students who work at other fields, or in other words, brain drain. Another reason causes the drop of the number of Literature students deciding to become writers and helps people in other majors become the key force, as stated by Nguyen Minh Nhat (2014), one of young well-known writers in Vietnam: “Writers rarely have a good quality of life only by writing”. It is the worrying fact of Vietnam Literature that writers nowadays do other jobs such as sellers and teachers. Along with fewer students are taking Literature, literary reading of global readers



has declined, where will the future of Literature arrive? Will the new writing force encourage the development of the country's Literature?

Based on the above-mentioned information and data, the research proposes:

1. Teaching Creative Writing subjects in high schools and colleges.
2. Reducing the number of general subjects in university Literature programs.
3. Provide incentives for writers, poets and create more occupational opportunities, especially in research institute, for literature students.

### Conclusion

The research mentioned the reason of Literature Bachelors' aberration in the modern literature world, the shortcomings of literature training in high schools and colleges and the relationship between the literature learners and writers. There are 5 main reasons including: current employment demand of labour market, the overpopulation in research institutes, impractical training curriculum, the lack of interest and experiences of literature students and the differences between literature learning and writing. Based on those reasons, I propose to create more favourable and practical training programs and incentives for those working in literature profession to enhance the number and quality of writers in the near future.

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## MISMATCHING OF LITERATURE GRADUATES AND CREATIVE

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