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A Needs Assessment of Research Competence among Foreign Language Lecturers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages

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ABSTRACT

Research competence is an important foundation for university lecturers' professional development and research capacity building in higher education. However, empirical evidence on the specific dimensions and developmental priorities of foreign language lecturers' research competence remains limited, especially in specific institutional contexts. This study aimed to examine the current and desirable levels of research competence among foreign language lecturers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages and to identify priority areas for improvement. A census survey was conducted with 202 foreign language lecturers. The research instrument was a questionnaire on research competence, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the modified Priority Needs Index (PNImodified). The findings showed that lecturers' current research competence was at a moderate level across all dimensions, whereas the desirable level was high. Development needs were found across all dimensions, while skills in Reviewing the State of Research ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.18), communication skills ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.16), and methodological skills ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.15) emerged as relatively higher priorities. Based on these findings, this study proposes competence enhancement strategies grounded in the Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization (SECI) knowledge creation model, emphasizing the sharing of experiences within research communities, the externalization and integration of research knowledge, and the continuous reflection and internalization of knowledge through research practice.

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Statement of the Problem

In an increasingly competitive and globalized world, innovation has become a key driver of national development, and higher education plays a central role in cultivating innovative talent. In 2024, a major national reform policy issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China emphasized the need for classified reform in higher education, the dynamic adjustment of discipline structures and talent cultivation models, and the strengthening of innovation capacity (Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2024). In this context, universities are expected to respond more effectively to national strategic needs by improving both discipline development and talent training systems. Since lecturers' research competence is closely related to knowledge production, instructional improvement, and academic development, it has become an important foundation for improving the quality of higher education and supporting innovation-oriented talent cultivation (Chen and Hu, 2021; Huang et al., 2024). Research engagement also enables lecturers to update disciplinary knowledge, enrich teaching content, and adopt more effective approaches to instruction, thereby contributing to both teaching innovation and students' innovative development (Geng and Wang, 2012; Sun et al., 2017).

In the field of foreign language education in China, both policy and academic discussions have consistently emphasized the importance of lecturers' research competence. Recent national and disciplinary policy documents, including the College English Teaching Guide (2020), the National Standards for Teaching Quality of Foreign Languages and Literature Programs, and the Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate Foreign Languages and Literature Majors in Regular Institutions of Higher Education, all stress the need for foreign language lecturers to strengthen research literacy, integrate teaching and research, follow frontier developments in the field, and continuously enhance their research competence in line with disciplinary development (Education Steering Committee for College Foreign Language Teaching under the Ministry of Education, 2020; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018; Teaching Steering Committee for Foreign Languages and Literature Majors under the Ministry of Education, 2020). At the academic level, Sun et al. (2018) further proposed that the competency framework for foreign language teachers should include

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research competence as one of its core components and highlighted the need to systematically examine its structure and developmental pathways. These policy and academic discussions indicate that research competence has become an essential requirement for foreign language lecturers in Chinese higher education.

However, empirical evidence suggests that the research competence of foreign language lecturers in Chinese universities remains uneven and, in some cases, inadequate. Liu (2019), based on a survey of 285 foreign language teachers from universities across 17 provinces and two municipalities, found that fewer than one-third of respondents (32.63%) genuinely enjoyed engaging in research, while over 40% (42.11%) expressed ambiguous attitudes, and nearly half (49.47%) reported that their research activities were primarily driven by professional title evaluation. By contrast, a large-scale online survey of 22,258 foreign language teachers conducted by Zhang et al. (2025) indicated active participation in academic activities and a considerable overall volume of research output; however, high-quality journal publications, high-level research projects, and international conference participation remained insufficient. Similarly, Li and Wang (2021), in a survey of 581 foreign language teachers, identified weak research competence as one of the major challenges facing foreign language majors in Chinese universities. Previous studies have also noted that both the development of teachers' research competence and the supporting research environment have long been neglected (Meng et al., 2019; Wang and Wang, 2011). This issue appears to be more prominent in geographically remote and economically underdeveloped central and western regions, where institutional development and faculty support often lag behind those of eastern regions (Tian and Ma, 2024).

Although previous studies have provided important insights into the research situation of foreign language teachers, they still have some limitations. Most have focused on general descriptions of research participation, attitudes, output, or institutional challenges, while relatively limited attention has been paid to the specific dimensions of research competence and their developmental priorities. In addition, many studies have relied on broad regional or national samples, whereas institution-specific evidence remains insufficient, particularly in central and western China and in universities with distinctive disciplinary or regional characteristics. Against this background, Guangxi provides a meaningful context for addressing this gap. As an important gateway for China's cooperation and exchange with Southeast Asia, Guangxi bears significant responsibilities in regional development and international

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communication, which makes the research competence of university foreign language lecturers particularly important. Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, with its strong foreign language orientation, offers a relevant institutional setting for examining this issue. However, systematic institution-based evidence on the research competence needs of its foreign language lecturers is still lacking. Therefore, the present study was conducted at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages to assess the current and desirable levels of research competence among foreign language lecturers and to identify priority areas for development. In doing so, it seeks to provide empirical evidence for designing more targeted strategies to enhance lecturers' research competence. This study forms part of the preliminary findings of a doctoral dissertation entitled "A Research Competency Improvement Model for Foreign Language Lecturers in a Private University in Guangxi, People's Republic of China".

Objectives

To assess the current and desirable levels of research competence among foreign language lecturers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages and identify priority development needs across competence dimensions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative needs assessment to compare the current and ideal states of foreign language lecturers' research competence and to identify gaps between them. By systematically collecting self-evaluation data across different dimensions of research competence, the PNImodified method is used to prioritize and analyze levels of need, thereby providing empirical evidence to inform strategies for improving research competence.

Population

This study included 202 foreign language lecturers employed at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages during the 2024-2025 academic year, representing 11 language programs: English, French, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Spanish, German, Cambodian, Indonesian, Burmese, and Lao. Eligible participants were foreign language lecturers who were actively employed and engaged in teaching during the 2024-2025 academic year. Personnel in administrative positions without teaching duties and part-time lecturers were excluded. Given the relatively small population size, a census survey was conducted involving all 202 eligible

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foreign language lecturers to obtain comprehensive and representative data. The population encompassed diverse characteristics, including gender, teaching experience, educational background, and professional rank, and thus reflects the overall research competence of foreign language lecturers at the university to a considerable extent.

Data Sources

The data for this study were obtained from foreign language lecturers themselves. As direct participants in research activities, they were considered well positioned to assess both their current and ideal levels of research competence. All participants took part in the study voluntarily and were informed of the research objectives and the intended use of the data before completing the questionnaire.

Research Instrument

This study employed the Research Competence Scale (R-Comp), developed by Böttcher and Thiel (2018) based on the RMRC-K model. The scale consists of 32 items across five dimensions: Skills in Reviewing the State of Research (4 items), Methodological Skills (8 items), Skills in Reflecting on Research Findings (6 items), Communication Skills (5 items), and Content Knowledge (9 items). The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part 1 collected participants' demographic information, and Part 2 measured research competence using the R-Comp scale. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure participants' self-evaluations of both their current and desirable levels of research competence. The response options were defined as follows:

5 = Very high need

4 = High need

3 = Moderate need

2 = Slight need

1 = Very low need

Quality Testing

The validity of the questionnaire was examined using the Item–Objective Consistency (IOC) index. Content validity was assessed by three experts from different fields: one expert in research methodology, one expert in foreign language teaching, and one expert in research management, who reviewed the relevance and clarity of each item in relation to the study objectives. The IOC values ranged from 0.67 to 1.00, indicating that all items in the final

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questionnaire met the acceptable validity criteria. Questionnaire reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding an overall reliability coefficient of 0.945.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed via an online survey platform (Questionnaire Star), and data collection lasted approximately two weeks. The returned questionnaires were screened by the researcher, and responses that were incomplete or clearly invalid were excluded. As a result, a total of 202 valid questionnaires were retained for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, while the Modified Priority Needs Index (PNImodified) was used to rank development needs. The interpretation of mean scores was based on established guidelines for interpreting scores derived from 5-point Likert-type scales (Warmbrod, 2014), as follows:

4.51-5.00 = Highest level

3.51-4.50 = High level

2.51-3.50 = Moderate level

1.51-2.50 = Low level

1.00-1.50 = Lowest level

The ranking of needs in this study was determined using the Modified Priority Needs Index (PNImodified) (Chimthongdee et al., 2023), which is commonly used in needs assessment research to compare current and desirable conditions and prioritize development needs**.** It was considered appropriate for this study because the study aimed to assess the current and desirable levels of foreign language lecturers' research competence and identify priority development needs across competence dimensions**.** The formula for the calculation is as follows:

$PNI_{modified}$ = (I – D) / D

$PNI_{modified}$ = priority needs index

I = mean of desirable foreign language lecturers' research competence

D = mean of current foreign language lecturers' research competence

Higher PNImodified values indicate greater gaps between the current and desirable levels and therefore higher priority development needs. In this study, PNImodified was

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interpreted based on the relative ranking of competence dimensions rather than fixed cutoff ranges.

Conclusion

The following sections present the results related to the current level, desirable level, and identified needs for each dimension of research competence.

Table 1 presents the current and desirable levels and needs related to participants' skills in reviewing the state of research (n = 202). Overall, participants demonstrated a moderate current level of research review skills (M = 3.32, S.D. = 1.00), whereas the desirable level was relatively high (M = 3.91, S.D. = 0.92), indicating a clear need for further improvement. At the sub-dimension level, all skills showed moderate current levels (M = 3.29-3.35) and relatively high desirable levels (M = 3.85-3.97). The PNImodified analysis revealed that systematic literature review skills exhibited the highest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.20), followed by research gap identification skills ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.19) and literature search skills ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.18), whereas research quality evaluation skills showed the lowest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.15).

Table 1 Current and desirable levels and needs of skills in reviewing the state of research (n = 202)

X1: Skills in Reviewing the State of Research	**Current**		**Level**	**Desirable**		**Level**	**Needs**	
	M	**S.D.**		**M**	**S.D.**		$PNI_{modified}$	**Rank**
X1-1: Literature Search	3.29	1.13	moderate	3.89	1.14	high	0.18	3
X1-2: Systematic Review of Research	3.29	1.19	moderate	3.95	1.09	high	0.20	1
X1-3: Research Gap Identification	3.34	1.20	moderate	3.97	1.06	high	0.19	2
X1-4: Evaluation of Research Quality	3.35	1.20	moderate	3.85	1.06	high	0.15	4
X1 (Overall Mean)	3.32	1.00	moderate	3.91	0.92	high	0.18	

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Table 2 presents the current and desirable levels and needs related to participants' methodological skills (n = 202). Overall, participants demonstrated a moderate current level of methodological performance (M = 3.35, S.D. = 0.86), whereas the desirable level was relatively high (M = 3.86, S.D. = 0.89), indicating room for further improvement. At the sub-dimension level, all methodological skills showed moderate current levels (M = 3.22-3.35) and relatively high desirable levels (M = 3.75-3.95). The PNImodified analysis indicated that identifying inappropriate methods, applying complex methods, and selecting data and sources exhibited the highest levels of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.20), whereas research question formulation showed the lowest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.14).

Table 2 Current and desirable levels and needs of methodological skills (n = 202)

X2: Methodological Skills	Current		Level	Desirable		Level	Needs	
	M	S.D.		M	S.D.		$PNI_{modified}$	Rank
X2-1: Research Question Formulation	3.30	1.13	moderate	3.75	1.14	high	0.14	8
X2-2: Data and Source Selection	3.22	1.14	moderate	3.86	1.13	high	0.20	3
X2-3: Research Process Planning	3.29	1.14	moderate	3.90	1.13	high	0.19	4
X2-4: Research Procedure Operationalization	3.28	1.13	moderate	3.80	1.10	high	0.16	7
X2-5: Appropriate Method Selection Skills	3.35	1.19	moderate	3.87	1.08	high	0.16	6
X2-6: Identification of Inappropriate Methods	3.22	1.15	moderate	3.88	1.05	high	0.20	1
X2-7: Application of Research Methods	3.32	1.14	moderate	3.89	1.04	high	0.17	5

Table 2 (continue)

X2: Methodological Skills	**Current**		**Level**	**Desirable**		**Level**	**Needs**	
	M	**S.D.**		**M**	**S.D.**		$PNI_{modified}$	**Rank**
X2-8: Application of Complex Methods	3.28	1.17	moderate	3.95	1.11	high	0.20	2
X2 (Overall Mean)	3.35	0.86	moderate	3.86	0.89	high	0.15	

Note: PNImodified values were rounded to two decimal places for presentation; rankings were determined based on unrounded values.

Table 3 presents the current and desirable levels and needs related to participants' skills in reflecting on research findings (n = 202). Overall, participants demonstrated a moderate current level of reflective research skills (M = 3.43, S.D. = 1.14), whereas the desirable level was relatively high (M = 3.85, S.D. = 0.80), indicating a clear need for further improvement. At the sub-dimension level, all reflective skills showed moderate current levels (M = 3.42-3.48) and relatively high desirable levels (M = 3.86-3.97). The PNImodified analysis revealed that reflecting on methodological limitations exhibited the highest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.16), followed by reflecting on social and ethical issues and interpreting research findings (both $PNI_{modified}$ = 0.14), whereas articulating ethical positions showed the lowest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.11).

Table 3 Current and desirable levels and needs of skills in reflecting on research findings (n = 202)

X3: Skills in Reflecting on Research Findings	**Current**		**Level**	**Desirable**		**Level**	**Needs**	
	M	**S.D.**		**M**	**S.D.**		$PNI_{modified}$	**Rank**
X3-1: Interpreting Research Findings	3.43	1.14	moderate	3.90	1.09	high	0.14	3
X3-2: Reflecting on Methodological Limitations	3.42	1.12	moderate	3.97	1.02	high	0.16	1
X3-3: Reflecting on Disciplinary Implications	3.48	1.16	moderate	3.89	1.06	high	0.12	5
X3-4: Reflecting on Practical Applications	3.48	1.13	moderate	3.94	1.05	high	0.13	4

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Table 3 (continue)

X3: Skills in Reflecting on Research Findings	**Current**		**Level**	**Desirable**		**Level**	**Needs**	
	M	**S.D.**		**M**	**S.D.**		$PNI_{modified}$	**Rank**
X3-5: Reflecting on Social and Ethical Issues	3.45	1.20	moderate	3.94	1.07	high	0.14	2
X3-6: Articulating Ethical Positions	3.48	1.15	moderate	3.86	1.10	high	0.11	6
X3 (Overall Mean)	3.43	1.14	moderate	3.85	0.80	high	0.12	

Note: PNImodified values were rounded to two decimal places for presentation; rankings were determined based on unrounded values.

Table 4 presents the current and desirable levels and needs related to participants' communication skills (n = 202). Overall, the participants' current level of communication skills was at a moderate level (M = 3.32, S.D. = 0.97), whereas the desirable level was relatively high (M = 3.85, S.D. = 0.75), indicating a noticeable need for improvement in this competence. At the sub-dimension level, participants' current levels across all communication skills were moderate (M = 3.25-3.39), while the corresponding desirable levels were relatively high (M = 3.94-3.97). According to the PNImodified analysis, the scientific conference presentation exhibited the highest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.22). This was followed by academic publication writing and academic report writing, which showed very similar levels of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.20). The need for academic writing conventions was moderate ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.18), whereas research presentation preparation showed the lowest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.17).

Table 4 Current and desirable levels and needs of communication skills (n = 202)

X4: Communication Skills	**Current**		**Level**	**Desirable**		**Level**	**Needs**	
	M	**S.D.**		**M**	**S.D.**		$PNI_{modified}$	**Rank**
X4-1: Academic Writing Conventions	3.33	1.15	moderate	3.94	1.01	high	0.18	4
X4-2: Academic Publication Writing	3.30	1.19	moderate	3.97	1.06	high	0.20	2

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Table 4 (continue)

X4: Communication Skills	**Current**		**Level**	**Desirable**		**Level**	**Needs**	
	M	**S.D.**		**M**	**S.D.**		$PNI_{modified}$	**Rank**
X4-3: Academic Report Writing	3.32	1.15	moderate	3.97	1.04	high	0.20	3
X4-4: Research Presentation Preparation	3.39	1.16	moderate	3.95	1.08	high	0.17	5
X4-5: Scientific Conference Presentation	3.25	1.18	moderate	3.96	1.06	high	0.22	1
X4 (Overall Mean)	3.32	0.97	moderate	3.85	0.75	high	0.16	

Note: PNImodified values were rounded to two decimal places for presentation; rankings were determined based on unrounded values.

Table 5 presents the current and desirable levels and needs related to participants' content knowledge (n = 202). Overall, the participants' current level of content knowledge was moderate (M = 3.43, S.D. = 0.94), whereas the desirable level was relatively high (M = 3.90, S.D. = 0.85), indicating a clear need for further improvement. At the sub-dimension level, all aspects of content knowledge showed moderate current levels (M = 3.33-3.46) and relatively high desirable levels (M = 3.85-3.95). According to the PNImodified analysis, knowledge of research methods exhibited the highest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.18), followed by knowledge of advanced research methodologies and knowledge of current theories, which showed similar levels of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.16-0.17). In contrast, knowledge of theoretical and paradigmatic developments showed the lowest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.11).

Table 5 Current and desirable levels and needs of content knowledge (n = 202)

X5:Content Knowledge	**Current**		**Level**	**Desirable**		**Level**	**Needs**	
	M	**S.D.**		**M**	**S.D.**		$PNI_{modified}$	**Rank**
X5-1 Research Trends	3.41	1.23	moderate	3.89	1.07	high	0.14	8

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Table 5 (continue)

X5:Content Knowledge	Current		Level	Desirable		Level	Needs	
	M	S.D.		M	S.D.		$PNI_{modified}$	Rank
X5-2 Current Theories	3.36	1.19	moderate	3.90	1.06	high	0.16	3
X5-3 Theoretical & Paradigmatic Development	3.46	1.22	moderate	3.85	1.09	high	0.11	9
X5-4 Research Methods	3.35	1.18	moderate	3.94	1.09	high	0.18	1
X5-5 Advanced Methodologies	3.37	1.19	moderate	3.93	1.06	high	0.17	2
X5-6 Methodological Application	3.33	1.20	moderate	3.86	1.08	high	0.16	4
X5-7 Publication Outlets	3.36	1.23	moderate	3.89	1.07	high	0.16	5
X5-8 Publication Standards	3.44	1.25	moderate	3.95	1.06	high	0.15	7
X5-9 Conference Presentation Standards	3.41	1.25	moderate	3.92	1.06	high	0.15	6
X5 (Overall Mean)	3.43	0.94	moderate	3.90	0.85		0.14	

Note: PNImodified values were rounded to two decimal places for presentation; rankings were determined based on unrounded values.

Table 6 presents the current and desirable levels and needs of foreign language lecturers' research competence across five dimensions (n = 202). Overall, foreign language lecturers' current levels of research competence across all dimensions were at a moderate level (M = 3.32-3.43), whereas the desirable levels were relatively high (M = 3.85-3.91), indicating varying degrees of need for improvement in overall research competence. In terms of degree of need and priority, the highest level of need was identified for skills in reviewing

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the state of research ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.18, ranked 1st), followed by communication skills ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.16, ranked 2nd) and methodological skills ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.15, ranked 3rd). The need for content knowledge was relatively lower ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.14, ranked 4th), while skills in reflecting on research findings showed the lowest level of need ($PNI_{modified}$ = 0.12, ranked 5th). Overall, the results indicate a differentiated demand structure across dimensions of research competence, with skills related to reviewing the state of research and academic communication emerging as priority areas for improvement.

Table 6 Current and desirable levels and needs of foreign language lecturers' research competence (n = 202)

	Current		Level	Desirable		Level	Needs	
	M	S.D.		M	S.D.		$PNI_{modified}$	Rank
X1: Skills in Reviewing the State of Research	3.32	1.00	moderate	3.91	0.92	high	0.18	1
X2: Methodological Skills	3.35	0.86	moderate	3.86	0.89	high	0.15	3
X3: Skills in Reflecting on Research Findings	3.43	1.14	moderate	3.85	0.80	high	0.12	5
X4: Communication Skills	3.32	0.97	moderate	3.85	0.75	high	0.16	2
X5: Content Knowledge	3.43	0.94	moderate	3.90	0.85	high	0.14	4

This study systematically assessed the current status, ideal level, and demand structure of foreign language lecturers' research competence at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. The results indicate that the overall level of research competence among foreign language lecturers is moderate, whereas the ideal level is relatively high, suggesting substantial room for improvement. From a dimensional perspective, the degree of development need varies across the five dimensions. Among these, the need is particularly pronounced for competencies closely related to the preliminary stages of research activities and the dissemination of research outcomes. Specifically, skills in reviewing the state of research (X1) and academic communication skills (X4) exhibit the highest levels of need, followed by methodological skills (X2) and content knowledge (X5). In contrast, the need for skills in

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reflecting on research findings (X3) is relatively lower. Overall, this study clarifies both the general level and the key developmental needs of foreign language lecturers' research competence, thereby providing empirical evidence for identifying priority areas and strategic directions for research competence development.

Discussion

This study, based on the modified Priority Needs Index (PNImodified), reveals a broadly consistent pattern of needs across the dimensions of foreign language lecturers' research competence, while also showing relatively stronger priorities at particular points in the research process. Rather than suggesting that these needs are concentrated only in a few isolated dimensions, the findings indicate that research competence development is both process-oriented and multidimensional. In this sense, research competence is better understood as a complex and multidimensional construct that operates across different stages of the research process, rather than as a simple aggregation of separate skills (Schröder et al., 2025). This perspective is also compatible with the five-dimensional framework adopted in the present study, which includes reviewing the state of research, methodological skills, reflecting on research findings, communication skills, and content knowledge.

This broadly consistent pattern may also be related to the relative homogeneity of the participants' institutional context**.** Because the participants were drawn from the same university and likely worked under similar organizational conditions, work-role structures, and access to research support, their evaluations of both current and desirable competence levels may have shown a relatively high degree of consistency. This interpretation is compatible with Li and Xu's (2024) finding that institutional support positively predicted Chinese university EFL teachers' research engagement and that adequate research mentorship and a supportive working environment may strengthen teachers' research skills and confidence. At the same time, the similarity across dimensions also points to the integrated nature of research competence. Research activity does not depend on a single competence in isolation; rather, it requires the coordination of literature review, methodological application, reflection on findings, academic communication, and content knowledge. Ciraso-Calí et al. (2022) likewise describe research competence as an acquired and developing competence organized across coordinated dimensions. This perspective helps explain why the five dimensions in the present study showed broadly similar patterns in both current and desirable levels.

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Specifically, relatively stronger needs were found in skills in reviewing the state of research and communication skills, indicating persistent challenges at both the entry and dissemination stages of research activity. Ciraso-Calí et al. (2022) likewise noted that state-of-the-art reviewing skills and communicative skills were among the dimensions that were less prominently represented in their sample, and their discussion further emphasizes that systematic review of the literature is one of the most important foundations for the development of research competence. Taken together, these findings suggest that many lecturers may still need stronger support not only in synthesizing literature and identifying research gaps at the entry stage of research, but also in expressing and communicating research effectively at the dissemination stage.

Compared with the other dimensions, the relatively lower need for skills in reflecting on research findings should be interpreted cautiously. It does not necessarily mean that this dimension is unimportant or already fully mastered. Rather, this pattern may suggest that reflective competence is not always perceived as the most immediate priority when lecturers are still primarily concerned with entering, conducting, and disseminating research. In contrast to competencies that directly support the initiation and implementation of research—such as reviewing the state of research, applying research methods, and communicating research outputs—reflection on research findings requires lecturers to move beyond task completion and engage in deeper interpretation, critical examination of results, recognition of limitations, and refinement of future research directions. Reflective processes have been discussed in the literature as important yet developmentally demanding aspects of professional growth (Mohamed et al., 2022). From this perspective, the relatively lower perceived need for reflecting on research findings may indicate that many foreign language lecturers are currently prioritizing the more immediate demands of research entry, implementation, and communication, while reflective and interpretive capacities may become more salient as research practice becomes more stable and experience accumulates. Therefore, this finding is better understood as a stage-related pattern in competence development than as evidence that reflective competence is redundant or unimportant.

Overall, these findings suggest that foreign language lecturers' research competence needs are broadly distributed across dimensions, but that some competencies function as more immediate priorities at different stages of the research process. This provides a useful basis for designing targeted yet stage-sensitive strategies for enhancing research competence,

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with attention not only to procedural training but also to the gradual development of integrative judgment, communication, and reflective capacity.

Suggestions

Recommendations for Application of Research Findings

Based on the findings of this study, foreign language lecturers' research competence shows differing levels of need across dimensions, with relatively stronger demands concentrated at the input and output stages of the research process. Accordingly, the development of research competence can be understood as a continuous process of knowledge transformation and accumulation. The SECI knowledge management model provides a process-based framework for understanding how research competence can be developed through the transformation of tacit and explicit knowledge. In particular, it is useful for explaining how competence needs related to literature engagement, methodological understanding, and research communication may be addressed through socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization processes (Farnese et al., 2019).

First, given the high demand for skills in reviewing the state of research, universities should emphasize the socialization stage by creating environments that facilitate the sharing of research experience. Through research teams, project-based collaboration, and regular academic exchanges, foreign language lecturers can participate in shared research practices that promote the transmission of tacit knowledge, thereby strengthening their understanding of research norms, problem formulation, and academic standards.

Second, in response to the strong need for communication skills, universities should provide more structured support at the externalization stage to help lecturers transform tacit research experience into explicit and communicable knowledge. In particular, universities may establish research writing workshops to support lecturers in organizing arguments, presenting findings, responding to academic conventions, and improving scholarly writing and presentation skills. Such workshops can provide practical and sustained opportunities for lecturers to develop confidence in expressing and disseminating research effectively.

Third, considering the prominent demand for methodological skills and higher-order content knowledge, universities should strengthen the combination and internalization stages by integrating research resources, methodological tools, and institutional support platforms. In particular, universities may establish research methodology consultation groups or similar

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support mechanisms to provide targeted guidance on research design, methodological selection, data analysis, and the alignment between research questions and methods. Through repeated application, feedback, and reflection in authentic research contexts, foreign language lecturers can gradually internalize explicit knowledge into stable research competence, thereby enhancing the quality and sustainability of their research activities.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, several directions for future research can be identified. Longitudinal designs could be adopted to examine how foreign language lecturers' research competence develops over time and whether different competence dimensions become more salient at different stages of development. In addition, more in-depth qualitative inquiry, such as interviews, reflective journals, or research narratives, could provide a clearer understanding of lecturers' lived experiences, perceived challenges, and actual difficulties in conducting research. Comparative studies across different types of universities, institutional settings, or disciplinary contexts may also help test the generalizability of the present findings and further reveal how organizational support, research culture, and resource availability influence lecturers' competence needs and development patterns.

Future research could also explore the potential of emerging technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI), in enhancing foreign language lecturers' research competence across different dimensions. Recent research has suggested that AI may support multiple stages of academic research in higher education, including literature-related tasks, methodological and analytical processes, and scientific writing, while also requiring careful human supervision and ethical consideration (Castillo-Martínez, 2024). For example, AI-supported tools may assist lecturers in reviewing the state of research through literature search, screening, and synthesis; strengthen methodological competence by supporting research design, instrument development, and data analysis; and improve communication skills through academic writing support, presentation preparation, and language refinement. AI may also help support reflection on research findings by assisting lecturers in comparing interpretations, identifying limitations, and considering future research directions. Further studies may therefore examine not only whether AI can enhance research competence, but also which dimensions benefit most, under what conditions, and for which groups of lecturers. Such inquiry may provide useful guidance for integrating emerging technologies into competence development in more targeted and context-sensitive ways.

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