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Proposing the Operation of an Experimental Psychology Laboratory in a Developing Country

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Abstract: - This study aimed to formulate standardized procedures for operating a psychology laboratory in a developing country context. Recommendations were developed based on integrating international best practices from leading labs with internal regulations at Vietnamese universities. Protocols focused on four key areas – scheduling activities, conducting electroencephalogram (EEG) experiments, equipment maintenance, counseling and clinical services. Structured guidelines were proposed across the four areas that aligned with global benchmarks while adapted for local academic settings. Detailed procedures covered scheduling workflows, EEG experiment preparation and execution, cleaning and storing the EEG system, and steps for psychological counseling sessions. The evidence-based procedures offer a valuable framework for strengthening research capabilities and clinical services at psychology labs in low and middle-income countries. By pioneering localized models adapted from world-class standards, this initiative represents an important contribution to building capacity for impactful experimental psychology.

Keywords: Psychology laboratory, Developing country, Standard operating procedures, electroencephalogram (EEG) experiments, counseling and clinical services.

I. INTRODUCTION

Experimental psychology utilizes scientific methods to systematically study various aspects of human behavior and mental processes under controlled conditions (Kantowitz et al., 2014). Sophisticated experimental labs allow researchers to precisely manipulate independent variables and measure changes in dependent variables to test hypotheses related to perception, cognition, learning, motivation, emotion, and social interactions (Cacioppo et al., 2008). Strict experimental control and standardized procedures are necessary to draw causal inferences from the data. High-quality experimental labs with advanced equipment and technology are therefore indispensable for advancing fundamental knowledge in psychological science.

While experimental psychology initially developed in Western contexts, globally representative research requires building labs and conducting rigorous experiments in diverse cultural settings (Arnett, 2016; Henrich et al., 2010). However, setting up state-of-the-art experimental psychology laboratories poses major challenges for researchers in low and middle-income countries. Funding constraints, lack of infrastructure, and limited training opportunities prevent the establishment of fully-equipped facilities for experimentation (Liu et al., 2011; Vuong et al., 2011). This severely restricts the ability of researchers in the developing world to carry out impactful experimental work and contribute uniquely contextualized insights to the field.

In countries like the United States and China, substantial investments have been made to establish experimental labs at universities and research institutes (Council, 2009; Qiu & Benbasat, 2010). But there remains a significant lack of resources for building and sustaining high-quality experimental psychology laboratories across much of the developing world. Addressing this disparity aligns with calls for decolonizing psychological science to correct global inequities in research infrastructure and knowledge production (Adams et al., 2019). Testing the feasibility of creating functional experimental labs in low middle-income countries could inform strategies for strengthening psychology research capabilities beyond Western contexts.

Vietnam represents one developing country context with immense potential for growth in experimental psychology, but currently limited research infrastructure. While psychology research activity has expanded in Vietnam over the past decade, it lags behind other countries in Southeast Asia (Vuong, La, et al., 2018). Experimental methods are underutilized and most studies rely on non-experimental approaches (Le et al., 2017). With only a handful of universities housing experimental labs, rigorous programmatic research is restricted. Targeted efforts to build capacity for experimentation could significantly advance psychology science in Vietnam and other low middle-income countries.

In summary, experimental methods and laboratory facilities are essential for progress in psychological science. However, inequities in research infrastructure globally have concentrated cutting-edge labs in Western high-

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income countries. Exploring strategies to create functional experimental psychology laboratories in developing world contexts could help diversify and strengthen the field. Research examining the feasibility of establishing and operating a psychology lab in a low middle-income country like Vietnam would provide valuable insights to guide capacity building efforts.

II. FRAMEWORK

In the process of building a model psychology lab, there are several key theoretical considerations to ensure it meets standards of a strong research group. These include lab design, organizational structure, and planning research activities:

- Lab Design: The lab model needs to be designed to align with specific research goals. This involves determining the necessary space, equipment, and infrastructure to conduct experiments and studies (Harris Jr et al., 2013). The design process should consider efficiency and scalability of the model.

- Organizational Structure: Define the lab's organizational structure, including designating a lab manager and research project leaders, delineating team member roles, and developing workflows to ensure high performance and efficiency (Council, 2012).

- Research Activities: Ensure the lab model has clear plans and protocols for research activities. Research typically involves selecting methodology, collecting data, analyzing data, and reporting findings (Cacioppo et al., 2008). This ensures reliability and scientific rigor.

- Project Management: Research projects in the lab need careful oversight to meet deadlines and strong research group standards. This includes managing timelines, resources, and budgets (Cooper Director & Spencer-Dawe, 2006).

- Data Quality and Validation: Ensure data collected from lab studies is high quality and reliable. This requires validating data collection and analysis methods and using statistical checks to ensure scientific results (Bradfield et al., 2002).

- Openness to Critique and Peer Review: Be receptive to critique and review from other researchers and the scientific community. This ensures rigor and credibility of studies conducted in the model (Lee & Bozeman, 2005).

- Developing Collaborations: Build relationships and collaborative links with other organizations and research groups to enhance capabilities and share knowledge. These partnerships can involve both psychology and interdisciplinary collaborations (Kahn & MacGarvie, 2016).

In a higher education institution, operating a psychology lab meeting potential research group standards requires management, processes, and quality assurance for research activities. Key theoretical considerations relate to managing and running the model to achieve potential research outcomes in educational psychology.

- Resource Management: Ensure effective management of resources including human resources (research personnel), physical resources (equipment, lab facilities), and financial resources. Resource management is critical for sustaining and growing the lab model (Kenna et al., 2012).

- Research Processes and Protocols: Define and maintain effective workflows and research methods. This includes developing data collection procedures, research quality control, and ensuring consistency in conducting studies (Harris Jr et al., 2013).

- Research Quality Validation: Implement measures to validate the quality of research conducted in the lab. This includes ensuring independence and repeatability, controlling extraneous variables, and confirming research methods meet strong group standards (Bradfield et al., 2002).

- Openness to Training: Provide opportunities for lab researchers to update skills and research knowledge through organizing training, workshops, and research practicums (Henry, 2006).

- Communication and Research Collaboration: Build networks for communication and collaboration with other research groups in educational psychology. Effective communication facilitates knowledge sharing, experience exchange, and strengthening lab capabilities (Kahn & MacGarvie, 2016).

- Embracing Diversity and Protecting Research Ethics: Ensure diversity is embraced within the research team and all research activities adhere to ethical principles and regulations (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 2008).

- Measuring and Evaluating Research Performance: Develop performance metrics to measure and evaluate research outcomes. This can include using scientific, publication, and community impact indicators (Lee & Bozeman, 2005).

- Community Linkages and Research Application: Identify ways lab research can support and apply to the educational community. Strong community linkages ensure research is meaningful and impactful (Mumford et al., 2002).

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Detailed recommendations

The experimental psychology lab requires dedicated spaces and equipment to conduct rigorous research. The recommendations focus on key infrastructure and capabilities needed to operate the lab effectively.

Subject Room

The subject room is designed for running experiments and data collection. As shown in Image 1, it should be equipped with

- A 19" CRT monitor for stimuli presentation connected to the experiment control computer.
- A keyboard and mouse for subject responses.
- Speakers for audio stimuli delivery.
- A serial response box to precisely record reaction times.
- A gamepad for inputs in gaming or simulation studies.
- A 64-channel EEG system to record electrical brain activity.
- An eye tracking system to measure gaze patterns and fixations.
- A surveillance camera for monitoring.
- A 22" LCD screen for EEG verification.

Researcher Room

- The researcher room houses the computers running the lab systems:
- A PC for EEG data acquisition with EEG recording and analysis software (Fig. 1).
- A PC for psychological experiments programmed with experiment builder software like E-Prime (Fig. 1).
- A PC for eye tracking data collection running specialized eye tracking software (Fig. 1).

Preparation Room

The preparation room supports researcher and subject preparation:
- A sink for hair washing prior to EEG cap placement (Fig. 1).
- Tables, chairs, foldable beds for subject relaxation (Fig. 1).
- Supplies like electrolyte gel, alcohol pads, and EEG electrodes (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Description of laboratory facilities
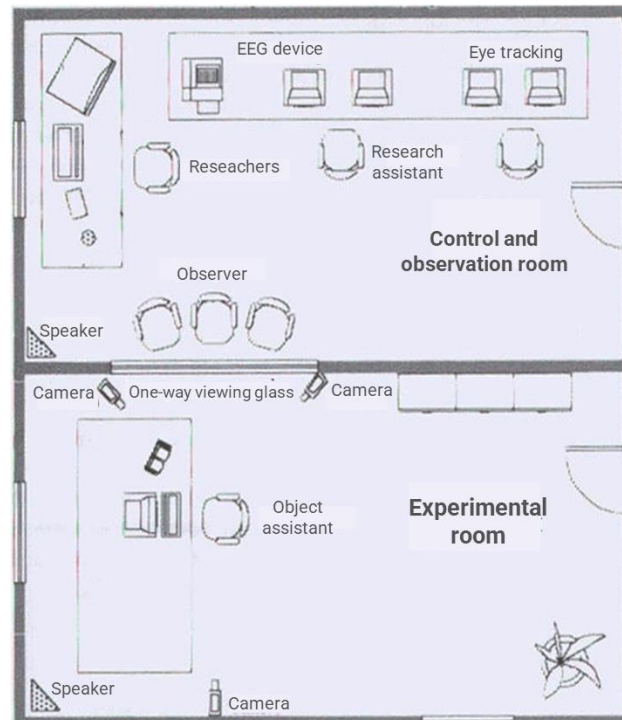
Source: Authors' preparation (2023)

B.   Training and support

Ongoing training and technical support is critical, as shown by the specialist training on the eye tracking system. Local and visiting experts should regularly educate lab members on using the advanced equipment. For example, collaborating with leading Taiwanese researchers and institutes can facilitate the adoption of best practices in EEG research and innovation.

Notable EEG research has also been conducted by distinguished Taiwanese scientists like Prof. Chin-Fei Huang from National Chiao Tung University. Prof. Huang has published extensively on using EEG signals to study cognition and emotions. Her work provided novel insights into how Age- and disease-related features of task-related brain oscillations by using mutual information (Liu et al., 2012). She also demonstrated the gender influence emotions resulting from positive applause feedback in self-assessment testing (Liu et al., 2015).

Distinguished scientists like Prof. Chin-Fei Huang can provide guidance on designing rigorous EEG experiments (Image 2) and analytical techniques (Huang & Liu, 2012; Tran et al., 2021). Taiwan's proximity and expertise makes such partnerships highly valuable (Chuang et al., 2022). In addition to leveraging external collaborations, detailed standard operating procedures and troubleshooting guides need to be made available internally.

The recommended infrastructure and capabilities, combined with strong training programs and partnerships, will enable high-quality experimental research aligned with international standards. Focused efforts on adopting best practices, training lab members, and establishing collaborations is key for successful adoption and development of the model psychology lab. This initiative can help advance experimental psychology capabilities in Vietnam and serve as a template for other developing countries.

Fig. 2: Professor Chin-Fei Huang provides training on using the equipment

Source: Authors' preparation (2023)

C.   Standard operating procedures for a psychology laboratory

To develop an effective model for the experimental psychology lab, recommendations were formulated based on international best practices and internal regulations at Vietnamese higher education institutions. The guidelines integrate global standards with local policies to propose optimized procedures for lab operations. Two key processes were defined: 1) Experimental psychology lab, and 2) Practicum training activities. Aligning infrastructure and workflows to international benchmarks, while adapting to the Vietnamese academic context, can enable impactful experimental research and capacity building.

Procedure 1: Scheduling experiments, group meetings, and teaching activities at the lab

- Step 1: Schedule experiments using the lab equipment. Scheduling is done by the supervisor, research lead, or lab technician.

- Step 2: Schedule research group and supervision meetings. Scheduling is done by the research lead, practicum supervisor, or Department Chair.

- Step 3: Schedule teaching, training sessions, or lab tours. Scheduling is done by the instructor or class representative.

- Step 4: Register schedule online or via a hotline.

- Step 5: Confirm or notify any changes/cancellations to the schedule via the hotline.

Procedure 2: Preparing and conducting EEG experiments

- Step 1: Prepare supplies like towels, combs, brushes, conductive gel, etc.

- Step 2: Clean and prepare the participant.

- Step 3: Measure head and mark electrode positions per the 10-20 international standard.

- Step 4: Apply electrodes using paste or vacuum method.

- Step 5: Check electrode signals prior to experiment.

- Step 6: Conduct the EEG experiment.

- Step 7: Remove electrodes and clean up after completion.

Procedure 3: Cleaning and maintaining the EEG system

- Step 1: Detach electrodes from cap and hang them separately.

- Step 2: Wash gel from electrodes and cap using a brush and water.

- Step 3: Wipe down electrode cables.

- Step 4: Rinse electrodes with distilled water.

- Step 5: Disinfect electrodes and cap in a sanitizing solution.

- Step 6: Rinse with clean water, air dry components, and store properly

Procedure 4: Counseling and clinical service

- Scheduling and conducting psychological counseling sessions

+ Step 1: Schedule via phone, website. Coordinator confirms schedule with counselor and client.

+ Step 2: Counseling involves information gathering, problem identification, proposing solutions, monitoring and evaluating outcomes.

+ Step 3: Log session duration. Coordinator follows up and evaluates after each session.

- Psychological counseling, consultation, and therapy procedures:

Each session lasts 45-60 minutes. If the client arrives 5-15 minutes late, this time is deducted from the total 60 minutes. Table 1 described the counseling and clinical process in the lab:

Table 1. Counseling and clinical process

Step 1: Building rapport, gathering information from the client	**Step 2:** Identifying the psychological issues of the client	**Step 3:** Advising solutions and determining a support plan	**Step 4:** Monitoring and coordinating support for the client's issues	**Step 5:** Evaluating outcomes and providing aftercare
Greet client, share information, and establish confidentiality rules for the consultation/therapy session; Build rapport and relationship with the client; Gather (written notes or recorded with permission) information about the issues faced and psychological support needs of the client.	Identify the main issue areas of the client; Categorize and organize the psychological issues to provide a consistent perspective; Use psychological testing tools and diagnostic instruments to aid issue identification.	Based on diagnostic evaluation and discussion with client, determine psychological issues; Counselor advises solutions and direction to address the client's issues; Develop counseling plan and timeline to support the client; For pathological issues, assist client with referral and coordinate treatment with external psychiatric facilities.	Provide counseling and support as per established timeline; Monitor progress and remind client about sessions or assigned tasks (app reminder feature); Coordinate with external psychiatric facilities as needed to support client.	After completing the counseling timeline, evaluate outcomes and decide on terminating support; Conduct post-evaluation follow-ups and reminders via quick tests to check client status (app-based). If no improvement, return to Step 3.

The establishment of robust operational procedures is critical for building research capacity in psychology, especially in developing country contexts (Vuong, Bui, et al., 2018). Formalizing workflows for lab activities, experiments, training, and clinical services provides a structured framework to elevate standards and output. At an institutional level, having detailed protocols enhances program quality, efficiency, and accountability (Harris, 2015). For the field as a whole, disseminating best practices for lab operations across universities accelerates norms

of rigor and transparency (Kahn & MacGarvie, 2016). By translating international benchmarks into localized procedures, this initiative serves as a model for advancing psychology research in Vietnam and similar middle-income countries (Henrich et al., 2010). The proposed evidence-based procedures aim to strengthen experimental capabilities and clinical services, catalyzing new insights into human behavior and mental processes that contribute to the global knowledge base.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study proposed four key procedures for operating a psychology laboratory in the context of developing countries. Compared to existing international standards, the proposed procedures still have some limitations. For example, in Taiwan, laboratories have standardized operating procedures with clear steps for experiment planning, quality control, data storage and processing (Wu et al., 2022). In China, psychology labs are fully equipped with specialized equipment and technicians (Xu et al., 2023).

However, compared to other developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the procedures proposed in this study are still considered a major step forward in building capacity for psychology labs. A study in Cambodia showed that mental health services still lack infrastructure and standardized protocols (Nordahl, 2016). (Raguram et al., 2002) also pointed out the needs for capacity building of labs, human resource training, and standardization of procedures in India.

To further refine these protocols, future studies need to focus on quantitative evaluations through field trials. This would help measure real-world effectiveness and calibrate the procedures for local contexts. In addition, studies should also concentrate on topics relevant to mental health needs in Vietnamese communities such as marriage counseling, interventions for the elderly, PTSD treatment, anxiety disorders, depression, etc. (Niemi et al., 2010; Sue et al., 2012).

Such studies will not only help improve lab protocols tailored to Vietnam, but also enhance the capacity for psychological research and application, thereby improving the quality of mental health services for the public. This is considered an important priority for developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region nowadays (Saxena et al., 2007).

Operating a model psychology lab presents valuable opportunities for research and capacity building, especially in developing countries. As an established teaching university, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education has unique strengths to utilize this lab for advanced training and experiential learning. Students can gain first-hand experience with sophisticated equipment and international standard experimentation (Harris, 2015). For faculty, the lab facilitates rigorous research aligned with global benchmarks across diverse topics like cognitive psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, etc. (Cacioppo et al., 2008). With enhanced infrastructure and structured protocols, researchers can contribute context-specific insights to the broader knowledge base (Arnett, 2016). Partnerships with international labs also become more feasible (Kahn & MacGarvie, 2016). Limitations remain in sustainable funding, maintenance, and competing with well-resourced labs in Western countries. However, strategic investments in facilities, training, and research can position this university at the forefront of advancing psychology science in Vietnam and Southeast Asia (Vuong, Bui, et al., 2018). Overall, the model lab represents a substantial opportunity despite existing challenges.

V. CONCLUSION

This study proposed evidence-based procedures for operating a model psychology laboratory in a developing country context. Drawing on international best practices and local regulations, guidelines were formulated across four key areas – scheduling activities, EEG experiments, equipment maintenance, and clinical services. The recommendations provide a structured framework to elevate research and training standards at psychology labs in low and middle-income countries.

As one of the first investigations on building capacity for high-quality psychology labs in the developing world, these procedures constitute an innovative contribution. With structured protocols aligned with global benchmarks, local researchers can gain capabilities to generate greater scientific insights that inform universal theories and models. The procedures offer a valuable framework for elevating research and training standards at psychology laboratories across similar emerging country settings.

Further studies should build on these foundational procedures to calibrate and validate their real-world effectiveness. Collaborative research with leading labs in the Asia-Pacific region can also help adapt the protocols for specific cultural contexts. Partnerships with countries like Taiwan and China that have strong expertise in brain research will be particularly valuable (Qiu & Benbasat, 2010; Xu et al., 2023). By integrating global knowledge

and localized research, impactful new models can emerge for elevating psychology as an essential scientific field across the developing world.

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