

Self-perception of teachers and managers of the impact of teachers' professional development in Vietnam

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Abstract

The professional development of teacher is an indispensable requirement for a quality education system. This has been demonstrated not only by global innovative education but also by Vietnam's educational development trends. This study was conducted among 293 teachers and managers at high schools in Vietnam. It aims to explore the formats that teachers used to improve their professional development, the frequency of using these formats and teachers' self-assessments about their impact on professional developments. The findings revealed that high school teachers involved themselves in reading, and conducting or participating in research. Teachers expressed their view that professional development based on school's characteristics or on creating a learning community within a school had the highest impact on professional development.

Keywords: professional development, formats for professional development, impact, high school teachers

Эффективность форм профессионального развития образовательной системы Вьетнама в самооценке учителей среднего звена

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Аннотация

Профессиональное развитие учителей является обязательным требованием качественной образовательной системы, о чем свидетельствуют и глобальное инновационное образование, и тенденции развития образования во Вьетнаме. Целью статьи является прояснение текущей ситуации в сфере профессионального развития школьных учителей Вьетнама, а также анализ их самооценки, связанной с эффективностью форм профессионального развития. Для этого нами проведен опрос 293 школьных учителей и администраторов. Результаты исследования позволяют утверждать, что учителя средних школ в настоящее время чаще всего вовлечены в такие формы профессионального развития, как самостоятельное чтение, самостоятельное изыскание и участие в научных семинарах. Тогда как сами учителя предпочитают создавать сообщества внутри школ, считая их более эффективными, чем другие формы профессионального развития.

Ключевые слова: профессиональное развитие учителя, формы профессионального развития, школьный учитель

Introduction

Professional development has many different names, including human resource development, fostering, professional learning, extra learning or continuous learning. Whatever the name, the target is the same: to improve the learning process of teachers and the performance of students. According to Hayes Mizel (2010), professional development is a process of providing teachers with different aspects of knowledge and skills (e.g. technology, new teaching methodology, subject content) to improve their professional teaching. Others believe that professional development relates to the improvement of an individual's career. It is a set of activities for teachers to develop skills, knowledge, attitude and other related characteristics to manage challenges in teaching and education as well as in satisfying requirements at high schools. It includes formal and informal activities aimed at developing teachers' professional abilities which in turns improves the quality of

students (Bainer, et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Macià & Gacia, 2016; Petras, et al., 2012).

Literature shows that professional development is the best strategy for schools to enhance the teachers' effectiveness. Professional development challenges teachers to learn to carry out their responsibilities and to improve the quality of students. A study by Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain (2005) revealed that more than three-quarters of a school's impacts on students' performances was explained by the effect of teachers (Hayes, 2010). Therefore, it is believed that enhancing quality of teachers is a critical factor to improve educational quality (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017; Davidson & Dwyer, 2014).

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the formats of professional development for teachers globally. The most popular formats found were training courses, workshops, certified learning programs, observing/visiting schools, professional development network, personal research and collaborative research; instant training, training through practical improvement research, lesson study, or building a learning community at school (Gaible et al., 2005; McConnell et al., 2013; OECD, 2009; Saito & Sato, 2012; Tam, 2015; Tan & Ang, 2015). McConnell et al. (2013) compared various forms of professional development and concluded that most workshops were costly and inefficient. This finding was repeated in a study by Ferguson (2013). Building a learning community at school was supported as the most effective format in many studies (Davidson & Dwyer, 2014; Lee et al., 2014; Saito & Sato, 2012; Tam, 2015; Hammond, et al., 2017; Owen, 2015).

According to Tam (2015), establishing a professional community in schools is a potential strategy for maximizing the quality of teachers' skills development. Evidence has shown that many programs within a school had significant impact on teachers. Activities such as observing or attending colleagues' lesson, academic research, seminars and workshops are common in schools. A study by Sims and Penny (2014) observing activities at schools concluded that this was a positive and constructive learning environment by providing opportunities for sharing and communication among teachers. Teachers not only found ways to enhance their knowledge through school activities but also sought opportunities for professional counselling, sharing ideas and teaching methods.

In Vietnam, there have been many studies related to professional development. One of the traditional forms of professional development for Vietnamese teachers was training for core teachers using a "pyramid" model. This is a model in which excellent teachers are chosen for a core group, participating in professional training courses from the Ministry of Education and Training. The core group then trains other teachers in the school. Cao's study (2000) showed that this activity created a habit of self-learning, and self-fostering among teachers nationally. However, this format was found to be ineffective due, either to the unrealistic contents in most training programs or because the ideas and the contents of the training courses were replaced or changed from the original (Pham, 2013). Some other updated forms were conducted, such as online training using "school network", and the renewal of professional seminars based on lesson study (Nguyen et al. 2014, Vu & Nguyen, 2010, Nguyen, 2019). The philosophy of lesson study is to develop professional skills for teachers (teachers change their teaching methodology by themselves); improving the quality and effectiveness of students and enhancing the relationship and cooperation among teachers within a school. Literature has shown the effectiveness of this format in other countries such as Japan, where lesson study was found to be one of the best methods to create a professional learning community to improve teachers' skills (Vu & Nguyen, 2010).

Nguyen et al (2017) believed that it is essential for schools to create a learning community, in which teachers as participants lead their own learning. This provides

endless opportunities for sharing academic information, connecting to other teachers and school, giving encouragement for ideas and creativities. The school activities develop and adapt with reality.

However, to what extent these formats have an impact on the quality of professional development is unknown. This study aims to investigate the level of impact from different forms of professional development on teachers in Vietnam.

Materials and Methods

The following questions were identified:

- (1) In what types of career development were high school teachers involved?
- (2) How often did high school teachers participate in different forms of professional development?
- (3) How did high school teachers self-assess the effects of different forms of professional development?

To answer these questions, we used quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires and structured interviewed were developed based on a theory of professional development. A pilot study was conducted on students at Primary, Secondary and High school Nguyen Tat Thanh, Hanoi. The measurements were then revised and completed for use in the main survey.

There were 293 participants, in which 239 were high school teachers and 54 were managers; 191 were females and 102 were males. The location of the participants is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Participants' characteristics

	<i>Hanoi</i>	<i>Bac Ninh</i>	<i>Thanh Hoa</i>	<i>Hue</i>	<i>Others</i>	Total
No.	67	73	78	68	7	293
%	22.9	24.9	26.6	23.2	2.3	100

The data collected were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, frequency, mean and standard deviation (SD) were performed.

Results

Forms of professional development for high school teachers based on community learning at school

The circular 26/2012/TT-BGDĐT, Regulation on regular training for teachers at preschool, primary, senior, junior high school and continuing education issued by the Minister of Education and Training declared forms of professional training, including full-time and online continuing mentoring. High school teachers participated in different forms of professional development at various levels. Twelve popular forms were used and grouped into three categories as shown in figure 1.

The data showed that self-development was the most popular option among teachers, following the continuing development with colleagues at school. Professional self-development included reading, independent research, and research collaboration. More than half (50.2%) of participants used reading to develop their professional skills, while only 14.6% of them chose research collaboration. Continuing professional development at schools included observing colleagues' class lessons, professional seminars, professional sharing with colleagues, and group learning (figure 2)

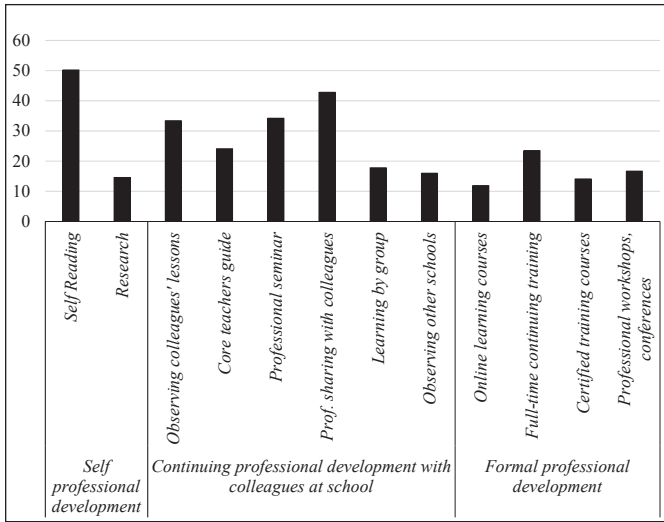


Figure 1: Forms of Professional Development for Teachers

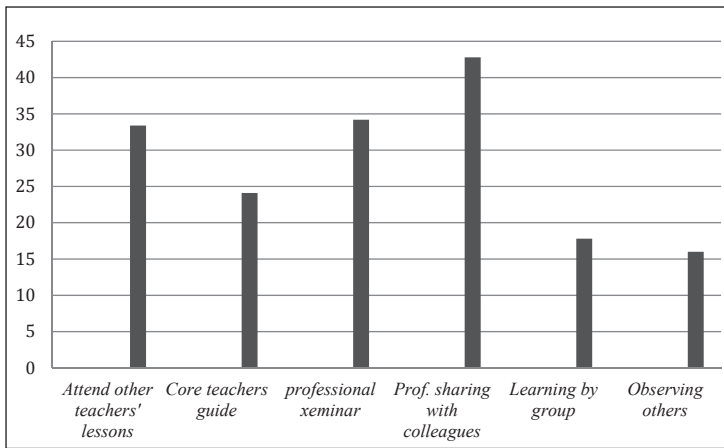


Figure 2: Forms of continuing professional development for teachers in school (%)

Nearly half of teachers (42.8%) reported using sharing information and knowledge with colleagues. Professional seminars were used by 34.2% of participants, followed by observing colleagues in classes (33.4%). Other less used forms were, observing experienced colleagues (24.1%), group learning (17.8%) and observing other schools (16.0%). In general, teachers participated in various format within this group with high frequency.

Training courses, workshops and conferences were full-time, direct formats that usually had detailed plans. However, they were not undertaken regularly, and the number of participants was low. The survey showed that 23.5% of teachers participated in full-time continual mentoring, and 16.7% participated in at least one conference or workshop. Certified training and online courses were reported by 14.1% and 11.9%, respectively.

Teachers choose multi formats to develop their professional skills, in which training within the school was reported as the most popular option. However, the rate was under 50%.

The frequency of participating in different forms of professional development among high school teachers

Table 1: The frequency of participating in different forms of professional development among high school teachers

Forms of professional development	Teachers		Managers		General	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Self-reading	3.09	1.029	3.35	.828	3.14	.999
Observing colleagues' class sessions	3.05	1.014	3.33	.952	3.10	1.007
Being supervised by experienced colleagues	2.17	1.349	2.57	1.175	2.24	1.326
Professional workshops within schools	3.00	1.145	3.54	.884	3.10	1.120
Online courses	1.79	1.311	1.89	1.436	1.81	1.333
Full-time continual mentoring	2.17	1.085	2.54	1.383	2.24	1.152
Learning in groups	2.01	1.320	2.09	1.364	2.03	1.326
Research	1.65	1.268	1.87	1.198	1.69	1.256
Certified training courses	1.62	1.301	1.85	1.172	1.66	1.279
Observing other schools (School clusters)	1.51	1.250	1.72	1.235	1.55	1.248
Professional workshops, conferences	1.93	1.299	2.17	1.129	1.97	1.271
Sharing professional experience among colleagues	3.17	.969	3.11	1.192	3.16	1.012

Table 1 showed that teachers had various options for developing their professional skills:

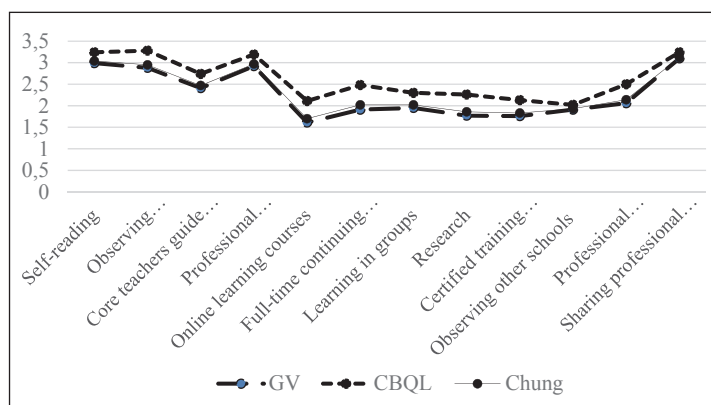
Firstly, the formats in which teachers engaged with a high frequency (more than three times a year) included reading, observing colleagues' classes, professional workshops at school, and sharing professional experience with colleagues.

Secondly, the formats in which teachers engaged with an acceptable frequency (two times a year) included supervision by experienced colleagues, full-time continual mentoring, and learning in groups.

Lastly, the formats that had the lowest engagement of teachers (once or twice a year) included online training, certified training courses, observing other schools (school clusters), professional workshops and conferences, and research.

Teachers seemed to participate in more activities at school than managers. School managers were more likely to report higher frequency in joining activities. The highest difference between the two groups of participants were “professional workshops in school” and “being supervised by experienced colleagues.” The potential explanation might come from the unavailability of teachers due to the duplication of the training courses and teachers' class sessions.

Self-assessment of participants about the impact of professional development for teachers



Note: 0 – no impact; 4 – greatest impact

Figure 3: Self-assessment of participants on the impact of professional development for teachers

In general, managers evaluated the impact of professional development on teachers' skills higher than teachers. "Sharing experience with colleagues" received the highest rating by both teachers and managers ($T=3.1$ and $M=3.24$, respectively). This indicates that this form of activity was highly recommended. All participants agreed that reading, professional workshop/seminar, observing colleagues' class or being supervised by core teachers had a significant impact on the quality of teachers with means of 3.04, 2.97, 2.95, and 2.47, respectively. Other forms that were less effective included online training, research, certified training courses, and professional conferences.

All forms of professional development included in this study, had a significant impact on the professional quality of teachers at many different levels. Both managers and teachers agreed that developing career skills based on the reality of each school and professional learning within the school community created the most effective outcomes.

Discussion

Education in the 21st century has moved towards the learner-centred model and a focus on capacity building. This implies the change in teachers' roles and functions in school. An adjustment is needed for the transition from a person who imparts knowledge to a lifelong learner. Professional development plays the core role in improving teachers' skills to meet the requirements of the modern educational system. It is not only a responsibility for the school but also for the teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In Vietnam, professional development has an essential role in educational innovation. However, according to the Ministry of Education and Training, some limitations should be taken into account. For example, the quality of training courses from the national to local level was below requirements (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009). Findings from our survey conducted among teachers at random high schools in Vietnam showed that there were three categories of professional development. The most preferred and most effective form was self-fostering, followed by the continuing professional development within the school, such as observing colleagues' classes, professional workshops at school, sharing information and knowledge with colleagues, and group learning. Each

Vietnamese school has compulsory professional workshops for teachers every week or month (Ministry of Education and Training, 2011). This finding indicates that the most crucial potential factor for the improvement of teachers' professional careers was school-based formats and collaboration between colleagues. These activities play an essential role in changing real practice, teachers' attitudes and beliefs in improving performance, behaviours and attitudes among students (European Commission, 2013).

Training via workshops and conferences was seen as being the least effective method. This finding duplicated that from the study of McConnell et al. (2013). This study concluded that participation in conferences and workshops was costly and ineffectively. Ferguson (2013) emphasized that short conferences supported by an expert were ineffective. The reason may be the passive presentations at such conferences.

There was a significant difference in the evaluation of the impact of professional development between teachers and managers. However, they all agreed that professional development based on the current status of the school and teachers' collaboration was the most effective. These activities were confirmed through the higher frequency of participation by teachers.

In general, this study found that the frequency of participation was higher for professional development activities based on school and teachers' needs. A specific policy related to professional development should be considered to improve the quality of teachers in high schools in Vietnam.

Although the current study was conducted on the standard criteria of the mixed methods, we acknowledge some limitations. First, there was a small sample size and the study used self-designed materials that might be subject to bias. Second, participants were selected at some provinces in Vietnam and might not be representative of the whole country. Caution is needed in applying these results to other groups of participants.

Conclusion

The 21st century has seen enormous changes towards learner-centred education and the development of skills. This adjustment requires a change in teachers' roles and functions in schools. Instead of transferring knowledge, teachers have become experts in lifelong learning. Professional development for teachers is both a need and a vital task for each teacher and school. Professional development targets the development knowledge, skills, attitude and other related skills, so that they can solve problems in new situations and in turn, improve students' quality. To reach this target, professional development for teachers should be created based on the real world as well as teachers' needs. Cooperation and positive learning, using models based on schools' needs and time frame are suggested for this form of activity.

Studies have shown that the most effective form of professional development for teachers are activities based on school and the professional learning community within schools. This community is not only the place for teachers to share ideas but also engenders a culture of cooperation among school members for a sustainable development. The ultimate target of these activities is the improvement of quality in teachers and students.

Moreover, studies about the reality of professional development for teachers has shown that they have participated in many forms of professional development nationally and locally. The findings indicate that activities that link to school were highly recommended among teachers and managers. The participation frequency of teachers in these activities were higher than others. However, the effectiveness of these forms does not meet the real requirements of education in Vietnam and the needs of teachers. An adjustment should be considered from the teachers' attitudes, strategies of each school to policies of the national government.

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