

# PHÁT TRIỂN NĂNG LỰC NGHỀ NGHIỆP CHO GIÁNG VIÊN TIẾNG ANH TẠI CÁC TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM: GỢI Ý CHO GIÁNG VIÊN VÀ CÁC NHÀ QUẢN LÝ

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*Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu quan điểm và sự tham gia của giảng viên tiếng Anh vào việc phát triển năng lực nghề nghiệp và từ đó đưa ra một số gợi ý cho giảng viên và nhà quản lý. Để đạt được mục tiêu này hai công cụ nghiên cứu đã được áp dụng: (1) câu hỏi khảo sát dành cho 30 giáo viên tại ba trường đại học ở Hà Nội và (2) phỏng vấn sâu sáu trong số họ. Từ dữ liệu thu thập, nghiên cứu nêu ra gợi ý cho giảng viên như: họ nên chủ động trong việc nâng cao năng lực nghề nghiệp; tham gia nhiều hơn các hoạt động như hội thảo, nghiên cứu hành động và xuất bản bài báo khoa học; đồng thời tăng cường sự hợp tác với đồng nghiệp. Bên cạnh đó, nhà quản lý nên quy định chuẩn năng lực giảng dạy; hỗ trợ giáo viên về mặt thời gian và tài chính, khuyến khích môi trường học tập và đầu tư mua các ấn phẩm về giảng dạy ngoại ngữ.*

**Từ khoá:** phát triển năng lực nghề nghiệp, đại học, giáo viên tiếng Anh, nhà quản lý, hoạt động.

*This study aims at exploring teachers' perceptions of and engagement in professional development and then offering implications for both teachers and administrators. To achieve these aims, two research instruments were employed: (1) a questionnaire administered to 30 teachers from three universities in Hanoi and (2) in-depth interviews with six of them. From the data, the study puts forth some implications for teachers, for example: they should play an active role in their own professional development; participate more in activities such as conference, action research and journal publication; and strengthen the collaboration among colleagues. Additionally, administrators are suggested to set teaching standard; support teachers in terms of time and money; encourage learning culture and invest in purchasing updated books and publications about language teaching.*

**Key words:** professional development, university, English teacher, administrator, activities.

## ENGLISH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the globalization trend has created a growing need for good

communication in English for trade, study, career and travelling. People with high English level will easily access information and knowledge about various aspects written in English such as

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education, culture, economics, politics and science. Apparently, English plays an important role in Vietnam's active participation in the globalization process. Therefore, our government has placed a strong emphasis on the teaching and learning of English at schools in general and at universities in particular.

Research has shown that teaching quality and school leadership are the most important factors in raising students' achievement (Mizell, 2010). Thus, in order to improve the quality of English language learning for students, teachers are expected to meet high standard of teaching because they are the source of knowledge, skills, inspiration and models for students. One effective way to improve the quality of teaching is continuous professional development for teachers. According to Mizell (2010), teachers participate in professional development to learn and apply new knowledge and skills that will improve their performance on the job. Professional development includes various activities such as discussions among colleagues, conferences, workshops, observation of colleagues' classroom, journal publication, research, book reading, etc. This article is intended to give an insight into professional development and its types, then explore the current situation of professional development of English teachers at three different universities in Vietnam and finally offer some implications for teachers and administrators to enhance the

effectiveness of teacher professional development.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. What is professional development?

Professional development is the development of a person in his/her professional role (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). It is a process including all activities that enhance professional career growth (Rogan & Grayson, 2004). Richard and Farrell (2005) state that professional development is one of the two issues in teacher education namely *training* and *development*. Training consists of pre-teaching teacher education, for example a BA (Bachelor of Art) program at university for future language teachers. On the other hand, development is concerned with in-service or long-term development of teachers. Development helps to improve the performance of teachers, students and the school. According to Edge (as cited in Wallance, 1991), the difference between training and development is that training is something that can be provided and managed by others, while development is something that can be done by oneself and for oneself. Thus, development mainly relates to the choices language teachers have in continuing with their professional development as language teachers once their period of formal training is over. Whether they are novice or experienced teachers, at every stage of their career, teachers need to further develop their skills, knowledge and pedagogical



practices. Harwell (2003) stresses that professional development should (1) deepen teachers' knowledge of the subjects being taught; (2) sharpen teaching skills in the classroom; (3) keep up with developments in his/her field, (4) generate and contribute new knowledge to the profession; and (5) increase the ability to monitor students' work in order to provide constructive feedback to students and appropriately adjust teaching.

## **2.2. Reasons for teachers' professional development**

Professional development is definitely a deciding factor for teachers to meet the changing demand of education as well as to better students' learning process. Specifically, we are living in a dynamic and constantly changing world where development and innovation take place in every sector of life including education. In recent decades, there has been an increasing demand for quality education in schools in general and quality of teaching and learning English in particular. As a result, English teaching has undergone many reforms relating to teaching methods, syllabus, course books, curriculum, etc. These reforms require a great deal of learning on the part of teachers to improve their skills, knowledge and expertise to meet the changing demand of schools and changing need of students (Wilson & Berne, 1999). In other words, language teachers must develop themselves professionally to meet the requirements and standards of current language teaching.

Additionally, teachers have more influence on students' achievement than any other school factors (Kane, Rockoff & Staiger, 2006). Consistent with this idea, Darling-Hammond (2000) argues that the most important factor in students' achievement is the quality of teacher in the classroom. For this reason, teachers play an important role in promoting students' learning English. Thus, it is essential for teachers to continuously update their skills and pedagogical practices to offer high quality lessons to students. By doing so, teachers facilitate students to improve their English competence. Once students become proficient in English, they have more opportunities to study abroad, get good job, upgrade their expertise through materials written in English, travel abroad for business or even live and work in a foreign country. Obviously, the achievement of students helps to enhance the reputation of the school itself and attract more potential students in the future. Moreover, the success of students also makes significant contribution to the well-being and the development of our nation's economy.

## **2.3. Types of teacher professional development**

There are many types of professional development activities which mainly focus on:

- Expanding skills and knowledge by reading materials like books, journal publications and language teaching magazines, etc.

- Sharing with and learning from other teachers
- Attending training workshops and courses

Specifically, the following activities will elaborate each type of professional development for teachers. Teachers can choose their own activities which suit their needs and availability of time to help develop themselves at every stage of their career.

### **Conferences**

An effective way to develop oneself is to participate in conferences for English language teachers. Teachers will have opportunities to meet and talk with others and learn from sessions given by experts or experienced teachers.

### **Workshops**

In each workshop, experienced professionals and experts introduce activities and models for the teachers and offer opportunity for them to work in groups as students to try out the activities. Through workshops, teachers have chances to experience and benefit from collaborative group learning.

### **Training program**

Taking training courses can make significant progress in one's teaching. It lasts in a period of time during which a presenter leads and shares ideas and expertise to participant teachers. It is considered an effective activity because a large number of teachers can be reached at the same time.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring happens when a more experienced teacher is paired with a less experienced one. Mentor teacher helps mentee teacher by modeling good teaching techniques, offering suggestions for class management and providing constructive feedback. A mentor teacher guides and gives advice to mentee teacher based on mutual trust and belief.

### **Peer observation**

This activity involves colleagues who observe and provide feedback about the observed teacher's performance. Both the observers and the observed benefit from the process in the way that the observers can learn teaching techniques from teacher being observed and in return the observed receives constructive feedback from colleagues to make improvements in their teaching.

### **Journal publication**

Writing for publication is considered an effective way in teacher development. When writing journals, teachers have to study a number of books and journal articles which help them to expand their knowledge as well as expertise. It also assists teachers to reflect on their classroom practice and develop research skills.

### **Action research**

Action research is concerned with a wide variety of evaluative, investigative and analytical research methods that teachers employ to identify the problems



and then find the effective solutions to solve the problems. It provides teachers with new knowledge and understanding about how to improve the situation in classroom and school.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants of the study include 30 English teachers from three universities in Hanoi. The teachers' ages range from 25 to 46, three of them are male and the rest are female. Two teachers have BA degree, 26 teachers hold Master degree and two of them are doing PhD.

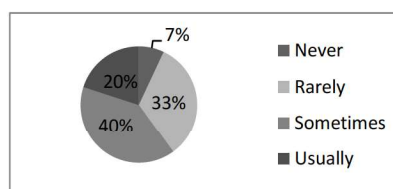
#### 3.2. Instruments

The study employed questionnaire and in-depth interview to collect answers from teachers about professional development. The questionnaire, which was administered to 30 teachers, included 8 questions focusing on respondents' personal information, their perceptions and engagement in professional development. Six of 30 teachers were selected to be interviewed face to face to elicit detailed answers. They were selected with regards to their approachability, proximity and their willingness to participate in the study. These six teachers are given pseudonyms by the researcher to ensure their privacy and confidentiality for the interviewees. Their pseudonyms are Hang, Hoa, Lien, Linh, Nga and Tuan. The interview aimed at seeking information for further explanation and exploration of the problems. All the conversations in the interview were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Teachers' perception of professional development

The results indicate that 97% of the teachers expressed their agreement with the idea that professional development was important for English teacher. However, when it comes to the frequency of practicing professional development, only 20% stated that they usually participated in this activity whereas 40% sometimes did it. 33% of the teachers claimed that they rarely spent time for it, and the rest (7%) never took part in any type of professional development. (See figure 1)



**Figure 1: The frequency of teachers' participation in professional development**

Through the interview with six teachers, it revealed that most of the teachers were fully aware of the need to develop professionally; however, as Hang explained, they had to do many other things which prevented them from engaging in professional activities. The following comments illustrated her point:

*"I spend too much time teaching at universities, marking students' paper and taking care of my children that I do not pay much attention to teacher*

*development activities. Attending conferences and development programs or reading books are the last things on mind my when I have free time” (Hang)*

*“I realize the importance of professional development but earning money to support my family and to pay my children’s school fees are more important. So I teach a lot of extra classes whenever I have free time. That is the reason why I don’t have time for professional activities (laugh)” (Tuan)*

In another excerpt, Lien explained why she and other teachers at her university showed little interest in professional development.

*“I myself rarely engage in professional activities because at my university the majority of students are at low English level. This results in my demotivation to enhance expertise because I think my English is enough to teach students. There is no need to improve myself when teaching easy lessons to students at elementary level. Moreover, the university set very low standard for students, as a result, both teachers and students do not want to make improvement” (Lien)*

It is worth mentioning that the majority of the teachers are well aware of the importance of professional development. However, due to time and finance constraints together with low motivation, only a small number of teachers genuinely participate in activities to enhance their profession. Thus, administrators play an important role in facilitating and giving

support to teachers by reducing teaching hours at universities and offering extra income for those who engage actively in professional development. In addition, school leaders should motivate teachers to enhance their expertise by setting high quality of teaching competency and high standard of student achievement. When both teachers and students work under pressure and commitment, they will keep serious attitude towards improving the quality of teaching and learning.

#### **4.2. Teachers’ engagement in professional development**

Teachers’ engagement in professional development is expressed in the following table:

Activities	Number of teachers	%
Faculty workshop at your university	27	90%
Peer observation	20	67%
Training program	15	50%
Action research	6	20%
National and international conferences in Vietnam	8	20%
Writing for journal publication	5	16%
Mentoring	4	13%

***Table 1: Teachers’ engagement in professional development***

It is revealed from the table that faculty seminar accounted for 90% which was the



most common activity employed by all the teachers. Observation ranked the second with 67% and training program occupied 50%. Other activities such as action research, national and international conferences in Vietnam, writing for journal publication and mentoring were among the least frequently used activities with the percentage of 20%, 20%, 16% and 13% respectively. It was partly explained by the fact that the first three activities including faculty workshop, peer observation and training were compulsory and regulated by faculty and university. All the teachers were obliged to participate in faculty seminar which took place once or twice a year. Hoa narrated:

*"We organize faculty workshop twice a year. All the teachers write articles about an assigned topic and some are selected to make their presentations. I recognize that most of the audiences pay very little attention while presenters are speaking. Instead, they chat, mark students' paper or work on their computer. I think people should keep serious attitude towards the seminar to make it more useful otherwise it is only a waste of time."*

Other teachers when asked, expressed the same concern about the ineffectiveness of seminar. Tuan said:

*"...the audiences seem indifferent to presenter's speech. They even make noise by chatting loudly with one another, as a result, the presenter turns from the state of being enthusiastic and eager at the*

*beginning to the demotivated state at the end."*

However, Linh expressed her enjoyment to attend seminar at her faculty because she found it beneficial to her and her colleagues:

*"About faculty seminar at my faculty, I find it very useful because it gives staff the opportunity to share knowledge, experience and pedagogical issues. In these meetings, teachers learn innovative teaching tips and strategies from their peers and then apply to their own classrooms. Actually this helps to improve themselves."*

With regard to observation, most of the interviewed teachers stated that it is compulsory to visit other teachers' classes and then report back to the Head of faculty. Hoa said if it was not compulsory very few teachers would take part in this activity because of time constraints and overlapping teaching schedules. In another interview with Linh, she valued the benefit of observation but showed her concern about evaluation after observation. This teacher said:

*"I sometimes go to other teachers' classes for observation. It is conducted by the faculty and requires the remaining teachers to attend. I benefit from this activity because I can learn some techniques from them. However, when it comes to evaluation after the observation, all the teachers are not frank and straightforward about the teacher being*

*observed. All the comments are generally good and people avoid pointing out the weaknesses of that teacher in order to save his or her face and maintain good relationship with colleagues."*

Concerning training programs, Tuan stated that he benefited from the courses he attended and made some recommendation to make it better next time:

*"I went to training program twice last year and I think I gain a lot of pedagogical techniques that I can apply to my current teaching. However, the things I learn at these training sessions are sometimes superficial. I wish next time, the training educators offer deeper issues that closely relate to current situations at most of the universities in Vietnam. One more trouble I had was that the training coincided with my teaching schedule so I had to ask my colleagues to cover for me during training time. Thus, to avoid overlapping teaching schedule, the leaders and training educators must consider the timetable of the trainees in advance."*

Less frequently used activities such as conferences, action research, mentoring, and journal publication actually are very beneficial to teachers. However, as stated by Hoa, she rarely attended conferences because the reasons were: *"(1) conferences are reserved mostly for cadres at my faculty, (2) I don't have*

*spare time for this activity, and (3) I have to pay the entire travelling and accommodation fee which discourage me from attending the conference."* This can be the implication for the leaders to support teacher in terms of time arrangement and money needed to attend conferences.

Furthermore, action research which is often carried out within classroom is really important for teachers in the sense that it helps teachers to improve their teaching which results in better achievement of students. So teachers should be encouraged to adopt this activity to develop professionally.

Another neglected area is mentoring which deserves more attention because it helps both mentors and mentees enhance their expertise. Likewise, writing for publication is given little interest by the teachers. The university leader should have policy to motivate teachers to publish their articles in domestic as well as international journals because it is also one of the criteria to build the reputation of the institution. Moreover, journal publication is intended to gain teachers' recognition and upgrade their profile.

#### **4.3. Teachers' difficulties in participating professional development**

As can be seen from table 2, most of the teachers claim that they hardly receive time off as well as extra money at university to participate in the activities.



Kind of support	Yes	No
I receive time off at university to participate in the activities	13%	87%
I receive extra money for the activities I participate in	17%	83%

Teachers also have a number of difficulties that prevent them from participating in more professional development activities than they can do.

**Table 2: Support for professional development activities**

Reasons	Number of teachers	%
Lack of time	27	90%
Limited access to ELT publications and books	25	83%
Teaching workload and administrative works	24	80%
Lack of money	23	78%
Lack of collaboration among colleagues	21	70%

**Table 3: Reasons preventing teachers from participating in professional development**

Once again, it is the matter of time that hinders teachers from taking part in more activities. Limited access to ELT (English language teaching) publications and books is also a barrier. Furthermore, teaching workload and administrative works from university is another reason that prevents teachers from joining more activities. Lack of money and lack of collaboration among colleagues rank the last on the list.

## **5. Implication for teachers and administrators**

### **5.1. Implication for teachers**

Professional development is a long-term goal that all language teachers should pursue to improve the quality of teaching and learning English. From the result of the data, the teachers should take the following points into account:

- It is advisable for teachers to play an active role in their own professional development instead of waiting for administrators to encourage them to do so or blaming students on their low proficiency. It is generally accepted that a fear of change, a tendency to blame others and laziness are three negative attitudes that prevent teacher development.
- Teachers should participate in more neglected activities like conference, action research and journal publication because they are surefire methods to gain more knowledge, skill and recognition for teachers.
- It is essential that teachers need to strengthen collaboration among

colleagues to have mutual support, trust and understanding in some activities like observation and seminar.

## 5.2. Implication for administrators

The data suggests some implications for administrator as follows:

- Administrators should set the teaching competency benchmarks and raise the achievement level of students so that teachers will be aware of the need to enhance their profession. The stages of teaching competency may go from (1) Beginner to (2) Competence then (3) Proficiency and finally (4) Expert.
- It is administrators' role to provide support in terms of time and money to encourage professional development activities from teachers. In order for such activities to take place, they need to be planned, supported and rewarded.
- It is university leaders' role to encourage a learning culture among teachers because a lack of university's attention can lead to discouragement in teachers' professional development.
- The university leaders should invest in buying ELT books and publications for teachers to update new knowledge, theory as well as pedagogical issues.

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