

Developing the Quality of Novice Primary Teachers to Meet the Renewal Requirements and to Enhance the Quality of the General Education

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Abstract Novice primary teachers need professional and teaching skills support. This study was conducted in the school year 2015-2016 at primary schools in 3 geographical regions of Vietnam. The sample consisted of 320 novice primary teachers (1-3 years). The content of the survey focused on two main issues: 1) professional support for novice primary teachers; 2) Some factors impede the professional development of novice primary teachers. This paper shows that novice primary teachers have not received direct professional support from management staff, especially principals. Professional training courses and pedagogical training are well appreciated; however, half of the novice teachers have not permitted to attend professional training courses. Teachers are facing a number of factors that influence on professional development such as low salaries, lack of opportunities for professional development. The study suggests some recommendations to overcome these situations

Keywords: *novice teachers, primary school, training, professional, skill*

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1. Introduction

In the recommendation of UNESCO on teaching "Teaching must be respected as a profession. This is a form of public service requires teachers to specialize in knowledge and professional skills, gained and accumulated through earnest and continuous research; it also requires gifted individual and a collective responsibility for education and students' duty" [1]. The experience and ideas of educators on teaching profession, working conditions, prestige and achievements have a significant impact on their actions, as well as on the quality and effectiveness of teaching [2]. While the studies on human behaviour also determined the individuals' subjective perception is very difficult to change, and often associated closely within oneself [3]. Therefore, professional identity is signification factor in developing as an effective teacher [4]. In this mean, professional identity is not just something that teachers should have, but rather is what they use to make themselves as teachers [5]. The approach is supported by a number of studies on the role of emotions in teaching, noted that teachers' feeling and enthusiastic toward teaching and their students have important impact to the teaching output (quality of training product) as equivalent as specialized skills or curriculum standards.

The sign of stress, apathy, dissatisfaction has been proved often create negative feelings, in which could not produce creativeness and success out of professional practice. Accordingly, the professional identity of teachers has significant influence to student performance rather than simply the a good education.

International researches on novice teachers show that they tend to have difficulties because they are new, lacking the knowledge of the curriculum, pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge. As we all know, novice teachers often spend more time preparing their lesson plans than experienced teachers therefore daily planning is one of the difficulties they encounter [6]. For example, new teachers may find it hard answering students' questions [7] as they lack the content or the pedagogical knowledge that allows them to deliver the information in the way that their students could comprehend. Novice teachers in difficult situations usually feel like they are failing. Without the full support, only the strongest and the most determined teachers may succeed [8]. As new teachers taking up the profession without any help, the price to pay for the schools and districts is high.

Intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic motivations have been highlighted as the most important groups of reasons for deciding to teach [9], and recent work has developed an integrated and empirically validated framework to

examine motivations for the choice of a teaching career founded on expectancy-value theory [10,11]. Identifying which motivations relate to teacher engagement, commitment and persistence is a critical next step in light of workforce issues and pressures to understand the factors and processes underlying teacher quality.

A number of studies have been conducted to have a better understanding of the concerns in novice teachers. In [12] presented a research from 273 novice teachers in their first and second years across the US to understand this issue better. Assessing new teachers' awareness during the transition from trainee to official teaching has discovered 3 big issues: the behavioral and diverse demands managements among students, limited time and workload, conflict with parents/guardians and others. Moreover, a combination of over 100 studies on the transition to official teaching show that class management, discipline, motivating students, resolving individual differences, evaluation, parental relationships, class organizing, lack of resources and students' individual problems solving are the most challenging issues [13]. Other studies identified that class organizing, preparations for first school week, expectation on the curriculum, salary level and maintaining individual mental state are the most difficult issues to encounter for novice teachers.

Challenges related to the curriculum in all areas: preparations before the lessons, interactions during and after the lessons. Reasons for these challenges are internal (eg. Lacking content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge,...) and external (eg. Learning demands from students, lack of motivation, lack of instructional or curricular documents; pressure to adapt to instructional materials for teaching programs or required experimenting programs). In fact, the internal and external challenges interact with each other and with other aspects of teaching such as class management, delivery of information and other administrative responsibilities.

Vietnam has always emphasized education as a keystone of its development policy. As one sign of this commitment, it allocates nearly 20 percent of public expenditures to education, significantly above the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 12.9 percent [14].

While achievements are impressive, Vietnamese government is concerned the education system is not well positioned for the age of providing the population with the skills and competencies needed for producing greater value in tomorrow's economy [15].

In 2013, the Fundamental and Comprehensive Education Reform (FCER) [16], which aims to meet its priority is general education (grades K-12), where learning approaches are to become less content-based and more competency- and quality-based. To that end, general education will introduce, new curricula and methods of instruction, reform teacher education. By this way, Vietnam teachers are at the center of the reform process.

Teacher education in Vietnam has many strengths, but it is not necessarily prepared to help teachers acquire this different professional profile and skills, nor to ensure the highest quality and most responsive onsite continuous professional development. One of the biggest challenges is that teacher education actors do not operate in a coordinated manner to meet teacher and principal new needs.

In Vietnam, a number of studies have addressed the issue of professional activity and teacher training in the context of education reform. The Ministerial-level Education Science research "Innovating Teacher Training in the Process of Industrialization, Modernization and International Integration," conducted from 2011 to 2014, has evaluated current status and proposed solutions to train teachers. Nguyen Thi Kim Dung et al propose to develop a pedagogical curriculum based on vocational orientation for students in pedagogic schools [17]. The decisive role of the teacher but above all pedagogical schools - the "cradle" of training future teachers have a large impact on the willingness of the teachers involved in comprehensive education reform [18]. Research on the skills of pedagogical students, Le My Dung [19] also pointed out that future career orientation has a significant impact on the ability of future teachers to master the emotion. In the study of career adaptability of postgraduate graduates also assert that the graduation process of entering the profession is "a complicated transition, turning point, "partly reflecting the process of being trained in pedagogical schools [20].

At the moment, there are yet to be many studies on the professional characteristics of new elementary school teachers in Vietnam. This research was conducted in nearly two years 2016-2017 in order to provide more evidence on the real situation of new elementary school teachers. The research results will positively contribute to the policy adjustments for general education and particularly primary school teachers in the context of implementing the basic and comprehensive renovation of education and training.

2. Content

2.1. Research Methods

This research selected 320 novice elementary school teachers (1-3 years teaching) in Vietnam as subjects to the survey in 2016. The survey were carried out in three regions in Vietnam which are representative of economy and geography identity. There are approximately 874 novice primary teacher of which 36.61% is the sample size of population (320 novice teachers).

Primary schools participated in the study show that most teachers are women. Male teachers in primary schools account for only 17.19% of the total. This is a common characteristic in primary schools nowadays (probably due to the fact that students are little children, year 1-5, age 6-10). Teachers participated in the survey mostly were formally educated and fully trained, with 3.13% of the teachers with graduate degrees. So it is clear that teachers' qualifications are quite standardized and equal on the professional level, these teachers are also equipped with professional experience and knowledge from professional training courses.

Surveyed schools are equally speeded across the rural area (60.31%). The rest are situated in urban areas with very favorable conditions.

The content of the survey focused on two main issues:
1) professional support for novice primary teachers;
2) Some factors impede the professional development of

novice primary teachers. From there consider the concerning issues and suitable adjustments for novice teachers.

2.2. Research Results and Discussion

2.2.1. Professional Support to Novice Elementary School Teachers

a. Support from educational managing officers

Regarding the support from principals or heads of departments to make the job easier, the study shows that the teachers barely get any support, if yes, it wouldn't be notable, particularly in categories such as knowledge content (62.50% not supportive, 34.06% supportive at a certain level; Class management (63.75% not supportive, 33.13% supportive at a certain level) and finally Teachers' professional development (74.38% not supportive, 23.13% supportive on a certain level).

Thus, the teachers have barely received any kind of support from principals in all three categories regarding Professional development.

b. The role of training courses towards the novice teachers' professionalism.

Only 41.88% of the surveyed teachers said that they participated in training courses held by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and Pedagogical Schools.

Thus, there are large number of novice teachers haven't received proper training courses from MoET and Pedagogical Schools.

Training courses held by MoET and Universities are rated as Very good (20.32%) and good (49.69%), 28.13% of the teachers left the question blank. Thus, the majority of the teachers agree that training courses organized by the Ministry and Schools are good and very good. This movement should be further promoted to enhance professional training for the novice teachers.

Table 1. Participation frequency in MoET training courses

	Frequency	Percent
No	181	56.56
Yes	134	41.88
Missing	5	1.56
Total	320	100.00

Due to the geographical characteristics and opportunities to participate in training courses to enhance professional knowledge, teachers in rural areas find the training courses more useful than those teaching in urban areas. This shows the need to focus organizing training courses for teachers in rural areas.

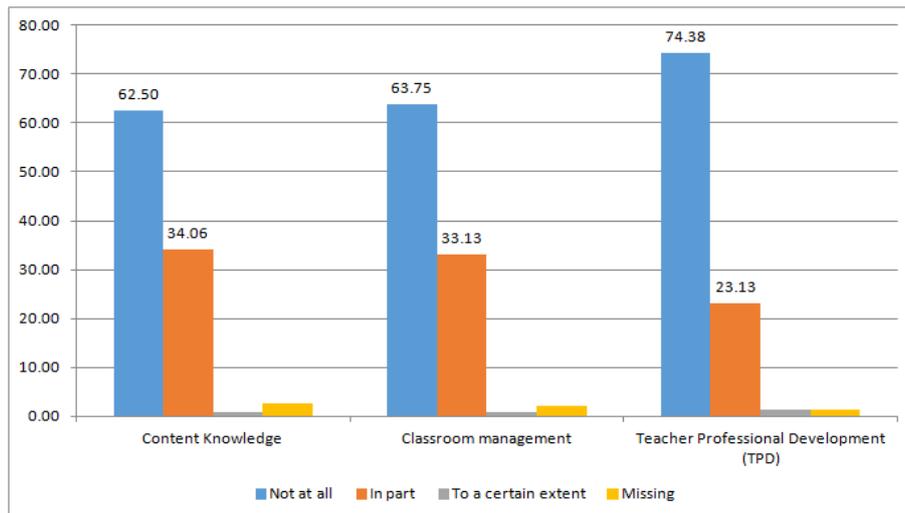


Figure 1. Support from principals



Figure 2. Ratings of training courses organized by MoET and Pedagogical schools

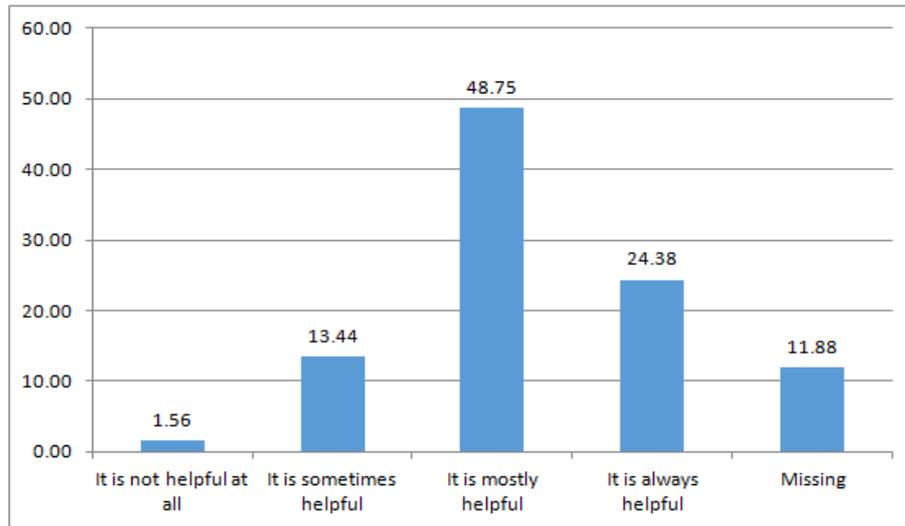


Figure 3. Ratings of training courses organized by pedagogical schools

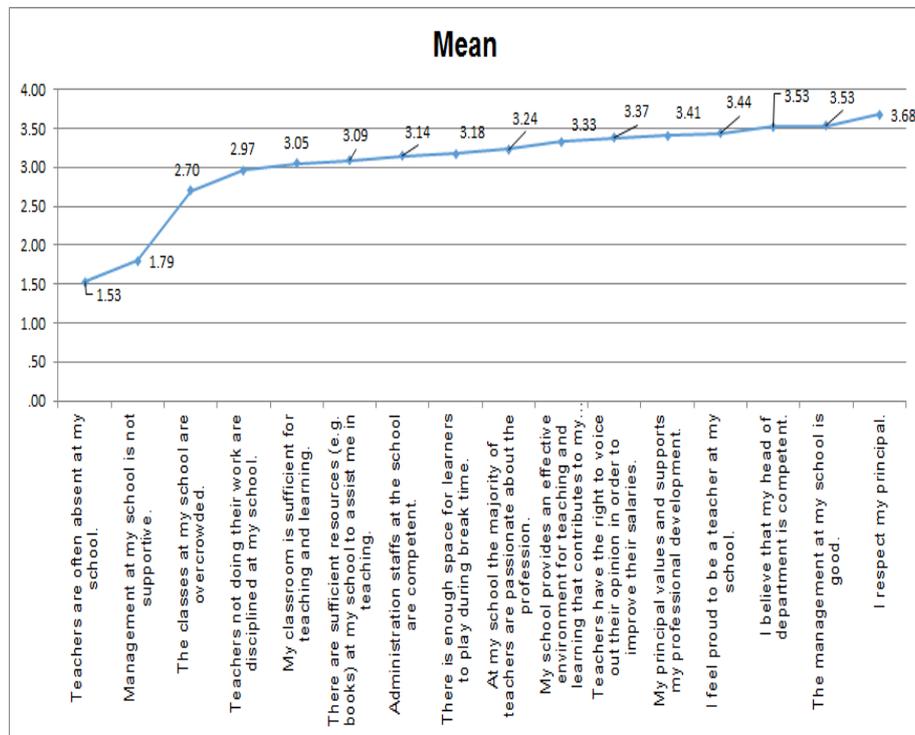


Figure 4. Mean of statement to the working environment

Figure 3 shows that teachers who participated in training courses organized by Schools rated these courses as useful (24.38% useful, 48.75% quite useful), only a small number of teachers rate the courses “somewhat useful” (13.44%). Though this is not a high figure but it poses a problem as when organizing training courses, Universities should focus more on making the content of these course more practical to the teachers’ demands. Regarding the training courses organized by MoET and Universities, teachers in rural areas stated that these courses are very helpful towards professional development. This once again confirms the necessity about location planning and training content. Training subjects in remote areas should be given noticed in the process.

Average values as shown in Figure 4 below are incrementally agreed upon by teachers for issues related to work environments and conditions for professional

development of pedagogy; these include elements that support teachers in terms of expertise, facilities and working environment. The mean value indicates that only two comments are worth less than the second one, which is "disapproval," "Teacher are often absent at my school" (Mean 1.53) and "School Management is not supportive" (Mean 1.79). The remaining comments are quite high in terms of approval and very agree. The two highest mean scores were "The management at my school is good" and mean 3.53 and "I respect my principals" mean 3.68.

2.2.2. Some Factors that are Hindering the Professional Development of Novice Elementary School Teachers

The factors that are hindering the teachers’ professional development are identified in Table 2. The most significant obstacle is the inadequate pay (35.63% quite hindering,

17.50% seriously hindering). The issue of teachers' salaries is of great interest. Research studies mainly indicate three basic types or categories of motives for selecting teaching as a career: a. extrinsic motives such as salary, lengthy holidays; b. intrinsic motives such as interest, personal experience, and intellectual fulfillment, and c. altruistic motives as wanting to contribute to the growth of another individual [21].

According to the MoET (Decree No. 153/2016/ND-CP of the Government stipulating the minimum wage level of people working under contracts), average wage level of teachers and educational management officers in public general educational establishments with 100% funding from the Government is usually varying from 3-10 million depends on the teacher's working experience. Teachers' income is concentrated at 3 levels:

Low income: Mainly focus on the number of young graduate teachers. This is due to the low starting salary of the teachers, the preferential allowance is based on the base salary multiplied by the salary coefficient and not being entitled to seniority allowance due to less-than-60-months working experience.

Average income: The number of teachers who have worked for 15-25 years, specifically with teachers with 18-year experience.

High income: Mostly teachers with more than 25 years of working experience, specifically with 35-year group.

The application of the current wage scale system does not follow the complexity of the job (for example: pre-school teachers, elementary teachers still share the same wage level), while the base salary is still lower than the minimum wage. As a result, young teachers earn less than the regional minimum wage while they have to attend training for at least 2 years. The gaps between the wage levels are still low (0.20, 0.31, 0.33 etc.) so the pay raise hasn't exactly helped the teachers' income.

Salaries and remuneration are low for the qualified, responsible and committed staff; but higher for people with higher qualifications even though they do not have enough technical and professional qualities for the job.

The lack of training opportunities (31.56% quite

hiding; 20.00% seriously hindering) is the second position of the teachers' view on this issue. This idea show that when they decided to become the teacher and to enrolled to teacher training colleges, they would think about upgrading their knowledge through the training opportunities According to the Education Law and the Charter of Primary Schools, the standard of elementary school teachers is pedagogical college graduation. These two obstacle can be overcome. There should be more training courses organized.

Regular teacher training is organized with these following steps: (i) Senior teachers training at state level; (ii) Senior teachers deliver training to teaching staff in regional schools. In both of these steps, the form of training is just basic training. Thus, young teachers are not attending training sessions with MoET experts from the senior teaching staff. Much of the content in training sessions was covered in a short period of time, so it was inevitable that the teachers who attend these sessions were unable to comprehend all the content. And this can lead to misunderstanding when training other teachers, including young teachers, and may even improperly deliver the content. According to MOET's assessment, along with the encouraging results achieved, the training of teachers in this cycle also shows many shortcomings, especially in terms of the quality of the training sessions from the state level to the regional levels.

For young teachers, issues regarding professional development can only be improved through on-the-job training, in classes, schools where they teach. Only with practical experience with diverse students, with different teaching environments and conditions, teachers can discover their own problems, hence the need to learn and ability to apply the content in training in practical classrooms. Moreover, issues that young teachers encounter in their early years usually only come from practical activities in lessons. Through this form of professional development, young teachers will get experience and feedback from real scenarios; question and receive specific, timely responses and see the immediate impact, as well as encouragement, which is extremely important to new teachers.

Table 2. Factors as obstacles for the professional development

	No obstacle at all (%)	Minor obstacle (%)	Medium obstacle (%)	Serious obstacle (%)
Too much work	15.31	53.75	24.38	5.00
Classes too big	15.31	58.44	22.19	2.81
Poor quality of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	10.94	48.75	29.38	8.44
Poor quality of general social infrastructure (classrooms, lighting, tools, etc.)	15.31	38.13	27.50	16.56
Insufficient salary	11.56	34.38	35.63	17.50
Low prospects for promotion	37.50	36.25	20.63	2.50
Lack of communication with other teachers	25.00	34.69	25.31	13.75
Conflict with colleague(s)	29.69	25.63	23.13	20.31
Conflict with school management	27.50	26.56	26.25	18.13
Conflict with educational authorities	31.88	22.81	23.75	20.00
Insufficient number of in-service training opportunities	14.38	32.19	31.56	20.00
Low prospects of securing study leave to pursue further studies/training	27.50	40.63	21.88	7.81
Great disparities between my practical problems and the issues addressed at training activities	20.31	49.06	23.44	5.31

Other factors affecting the development of teachers such as low quality facilities (classroom, lighting, teaching tools, etc.) (mean = 2.54); Low ICT quality (mean = 2.64); Conflict with school management (mean = 2.64); Conflicts with colleagues (mean = 2.66); Conflicts with educational authority (mean = 2.68).

Factors that have little influence on the professional development of teachers are Prospect of promotion (mean 3.12) and Prospect of being granted leave time to attend training (mean = 2.90). These two personal issues have little impact on teachers' professional development.

Other influencing factors that directly affect the teachers' development such as low quality facilities (mean = 2.54); Poor IT applications (Mean = 2.64); Conflicts in school management (Mean = 2.64); Conflicts between colleagues (Mean = 2.66); conflicts with educational authorities (Mean = 2.68).

Factors that have little influence on teachers' professional development are "Less prospect of promotion" (mean = 3.12)

and "Low prospect of being allow on leave to participate in training courses" (Mean = 2.90), these two personal issues have little impact on the professional development of the teachers.

Figure 5 below shows the average values of those factors that are hindering the professional development of teachers in all 3 areas: downtown, urban and rural.

The data presented in Figure 5 shows the factors that affects the teachers' professional development in downtown areas: conflicts between colleagues; low prospects of being allowed on leave to participate in training courses (mean 3.33); lack of communication towards other teachers and Conflicts in school management (mean 3.19 & 3.22), these factors are different from those from the rural and urban areas. Teachers from the rural areas show that the hindering factors are Low prospects of promotions and Heavy workload (mean 3.23 & 2.91). Teachers from urban areas have issues with "Low prospects of promotions" (mean 2.71).

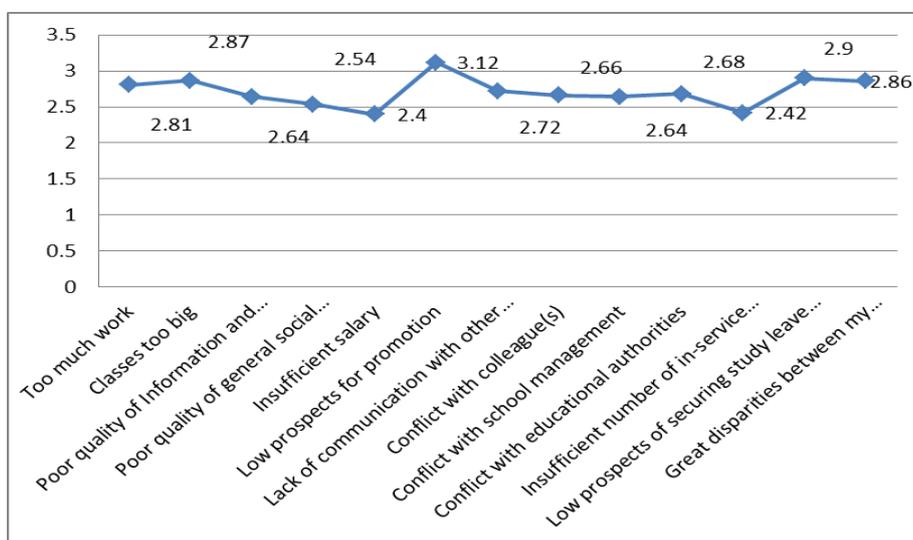


Figure 5. Mean on the hindering factors from teachers

3. Conclusion

Teaching staff is the soul of every school. At the elementary level, as the initial stage of general education, teachers play a decisive role in the quality of primary education (elementary and secondary/middle schools). Therefore, the focus set on developing the teaching force in both quality and quantity should be adequate and with the specific policies.

The research results show that novice elementary school teachers are well equipped with knowledge, experience, faith in the profession; all obstacles, challenges that these teachers are encountering mostly come from their students, the students' families as well as other factors. They can overcome these with proper care and support from managerial bodies.

From the research results, authors raise these recommendations related to the issues regarding the training and developing the force of elementary school teachers:

- Prioritize building and innovating the teacher training system; recalibrate the system of pedagogical universities, colleges and focus on big establishments, key universities as anchors for the system of pedagogical schools. Pedagogical schools should be prioritized with specific mechanism and policies to focus on enhancing the quality of training and scientific researching, training high-quality teachers.

- The government and local authorities should prioritize habitual training for teachers with the practical contents that are close to learners based on areas.

- More funding in order to increase the number of training courses organized by the State bodies such as MoET and pedagogical Universities to improve the quality and efficiency of the courses, through which teachers would be able to approach new knowledge and teaching methods.

- A big focus should be set on the process of selecting teachers to participate in training courses, especially in outer-suburb and rural schools and small schools, short on staff with prioritized resources and suitable mechanism to ensure the sufficient funding for annual teacher training.

- Renew the evaluating mechanism along with rewarding and encouraging teachers to voluntarily participate in training to develop their professional knowledge and skills.

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