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TEACHERS' PERSONAL NEEDS AND PLANS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY WITH EFL NOVICE TEACHERS AT UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, HUE UNIVERSITY

Nguyen Trinh Thao Trinh¹, Nguyen Ho Hoang Thuy²

^{1,2}University of Foreign Languages, Hue University

Abstract

This case study explores the personal needs and plans of EFL novice teachers at Hue University of Foreign Languages (HUFL) in their Professional Development (PD) journey. Ten EFL novice lecturers currently teaching at HUFL with under five years of teaching experience were asked to reflect on their experience, personal needs, and plans for PD. The issues under investigation included (1) EFL novice teachers' personal needs for PD and whether the PD activities held at HUFL met their needs, and (2) their PD plans. Data collected from individual semi-structured interviews and personal documents showed that most novice teachers had similar needs for their PD and they held distinct opinions towards PD activities organised at HUFL, including positive and negative ones. Besides, most of them did not have a specific plan for their long-term PD. Implications and recommendations were also proposed to improve the upcoming PD activities in educational contexts.

Keywords: EFL novice teachers, professional development, needs for PD, teachers' PD planning.

1. Introduction

Vietnamese education has seen substantial changes during the last two decades in various areas, most notably at the higher education level (Le, 2002). Educators have attempted to keep up with and adapt to the world's astounding development (Truong, 2017). Specifically, with the Vietnamese government's current opening policies and programs to the international market, it has been an imperative mission for the Vietnamese education system to equip students with relevant knowledge and skills to meet the labor market demand not only in Vietnam but also on an international level (Le, 2002; Truong, 2017). Additionally, it is evident that one of the most critical qualities that students must acquire is the ability to communicate in an international language, which, of course, should be English, given the language's overwhelming popularity (Hoang, 2020). As a result, instructors' responsibility is essential and rising in order to assist pupils in accomplishing this goal.

The Vietnamese government, particularly the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), has been investing in training and improving teachers' teaching methods and strategies at all levels, including university, by organizing professional development (PD)

programs for educators to participate in or by providing opportunities for such activities to be organized. This is because professional development (PD) is widely believed to have a significant impact on teachers' teaching competency (Bell & Gilbert, 1996; Vo & Nguyen, 2009), hence increasing students' learning outcomes (Guskey, 2000; Harnett, 2012; Hoang, 2020). Additionally, PD significantly assists a company in implementing educational improvements and growing as a whole (Nguyen, 2018; Tran, 2009). Thus, it is undeniable that professional development is critical for one's job and personal life, even more so for those who lack experience in their field of competence, such as novice teachers. Without adequate training, these novice teachers may spend an inordinate amount of time experiencing shocking feelings or failures (Marshall, Fittinghoff, & Cheney, 1990), which may have a detrimental effect on not only teachers' effectiveness and learner outcomes, but also on the institution's development (David and Reynolds, 2000). As a result, it is critical for novice teachers to understand their particular circumstances, which will enable them to develop appropriate professional development plans for the remainder of their careers. Numerous research has demonstrated the critical importance of novice teachers participating in professional development programs.

Although professional development for EFL teachers in Vietnam is receiving increasing attention in recent years (Le, 2018), most studies focus on the types of professional development programs for English teachers (Nguyen, 1986), teachers' perceptions of professional development (Tran, 2015), and teachers' experiences with various professional development activities or models for English teachers in Vietnam (Le, 2018). There has been minimal research that examines the personal requirements of these teachers in order to assist them in their careers,, particularly at the tertiary level in Vietnam. Therefore, the current study was conducted to explore EFL novice lecturers' needs and personal plans in a tertiary context in Vietnam in order to assist novice teachers in their professional development.

The study, therefore, aims to address two following questions:

1. What are the EFL novice teachers' personal needs for PD? To what extent do the PD activities at HUFL meet their needs?
2. What are the EFL novice teachers' plans for their PD?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Professional Development

The concept "Professional Development" (PD) is defined diversely according to different scholars. However, this study solely focuses on the PD's definitions related to the development of teachers rather than other fields.

Joyce et al. (1977, as cited in Hoang, 2020, p.49) considered PD as both formal and informal programs that teachers attend to improve their professional knowledge as "educated people, professionals or scholars" to accomplish their career goals and missions.

Later, a more specific definition given by Yadov (2011) refers to PD as the activity that involves both formal and informal interactions such as attending seminars, engaging in professional meetings, and mentoring, as well as reading professional journals and watching television documentaries related to an academic discipline.

Glatthorn (1995) also argues that teacher PD is "the professional growth a teacher achieves due to gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically." Therefore, it is possible to conclude that teacher PD includes not only external activities like taking part in workshops, professional seminars, etc., but also internal practices such as teacher's experience or self-evaluation.

Furthermore, teacher professional development is sometimes called in-service education or staff development (Ono & Ferreira, 2010), provided via important short-term events. These are also called "traditional" forms of PD that aim to enable teachers to obtain new information related to their career or simply update and improve their knowledge (Hoang, 2020). Researchers also categorize PD activities as "reform" PD activities (Danzig & Wright, 2017) which are known as "a variety of PD activities that accompany continuous inquiry into one's instruction practice." Professional development can result in substantial improvements in teachers' personal and professional knowledge, including teaching methods, strategies, and values, possibly resulting in better student learning outcomes (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002)

It is imperative for teachers to know how many types of PD and what type could be suitable for them; thereby, they could search for appropriate ones for their needs and personal plans. Mann (2005, as cited in Al Hosni, 2020, pp.78-85) stated the differences between the terms "Professional Development" and "continuing professional development" by suggesting that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has a more personal picture while PD is more "career-oriented." According to Kennedy (2005), there are nine types of CPD, including "(1) training; (2) award-bearing; (3) deficit; (4) cascade; (5) standards-based; (6) coaching/mentoring; (7) community of practice; (8) action research; (9) transformative".

Regarding the impacts of PD, PD usually leads to positive changes to teachers' behaviors, beliefs by different kinds of activities. Particularly, the teachers' changes could refer to "teacher development," "teacher growth," "implementation of innovation or reform," and "cognitive and affective change" (Richardson & Placier, 2001, pp.934-935).

2.2. Novice teachers and professional development

Kim and Roth (2011) stated a broad definition of novice teachers, the ones who meet obstacles when dealing with their tasks at work, like beginning teachers, neophytes, and pre-service teachers; therefore, they defined novice teachers are the people who have less than five years of working experience. However, Farrell (2012) claimed that there is no clear definition of novice teachers. Still, he defined these as those who teach for the first

time, without elaborating on how long a novice teacher should keep their title. Meanwhile, according to Karatas and Karaman (2013), novice teachers usually have experience of teaching that is less than two years. In addition, Day and Gu (2007) claimed that the first three years are a distinct time in the professional growth of teachers. Widiati et al. (2018) also gave a definition with a similar working time experience, by which a novice teacher is someone who has completed pre-service teacher education and has about three years of teaching experience

Therefore, novice teachers could be described as a group of teachers with limited professional experience, thus facing difficulties in their work. Therefore, there is obviously a need for novice teachers to participate in PD programs as supporting programs to enable them to develop and improve themselves so that they could overcome the mentioned difficulties. Particularly, Darling-Hammond (2003) concluded that by taking part in PD well-designed and well-funded programs, novice teachers tremendously benefit from these. More interestingly, it is suggested that by holding these kinds of activities, leaderboards of schools or organizations could build a better relationship among novice teachers, experienced ones, and administrators (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

2.3. Review of related studies

There has been an increase in the number of research projects on professional development, both globally and in Vietnam, being conducted to examine novice teachers' professional development. On a global scale, Kim and Roth (2011) conducted a case study of EFL novice teachers and the way they acquired job-related information to assist them in overcoming workplace obstacles and determining how they could independently develop their professional knowledge during their first years of teaching. Meanwhile, Fantilli and McDougall (2009) conducted a mixed-method study involving questionnaires and interviews with 86 novice teachers at Ontario University to ascertain the problems encountered by these teachers during their first years of employment. Within the Vietnamese context, Le (2018) conducted a qualitative study at several lower secondary schools in Hue, Vietnam, to explore the EFL teachers' attitudes regarding professional development. This author discovered that these teachers expressed positive attitudes toward professional development activities despite the obstacles they encountered while participating in these programs, including a lack of motivation, knowledge, and collaboration among colleagues; however, the most dominant issue they had was a lack of time due to their overload work. Using a similar approach, Hoang (2020) conducted a study on enablers and barriers to professional development for in-service EFL teachers in the context of Vietnamese higher education to ascertain the current state of professional development for Vietnamese EFL lecturers, as well as the challenges and benefits associated with participation in professional development activities. Truong and Murray (2020) conducted a qualitative study on online professional development programs in the information age, in which nineteen EFL teachers participated in semi-structured interviews