PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020
449

SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT GENERAL EDUCATION REFORMS IN VIETNAM: PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

Ngoc Hai Tran
Ha Tinh University, Vietnam
E-mail: haingoc74@gmail.com

Thang Dinh Truong
Quang Tri College of Education, Vietnam
E-mail: thangnewzealand@yahoo.com

Hong-Van Thi Dinh
University of Education, Hue University, Vietnam
E-mail: dinhthihongvan@dhsphue.edu.vn

Le-Hang Thi Do
Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam
E-mail: dothilehang@gmail.com

Tu-Anh Thi Tran
University of Education, Hue University, Vietnam
E-mail: tranthituanh@dhsphue.edu.vn

Mai-Huong Thi Phan
Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam
E-mail: huongphanmai@gmail.com

Abstract

Teacher professional development (TPD) plays a vital role in enhancing student achievement and the education quality improvement at general education schools. Vietnam is carrying out the general education reforms including the curriculum, teaching methodology and textbook replacement. In order to make those reforms succeed, a lot of things have been done so far in which TPD is considered a key measure. This qualitative case-study research aimed to find out the perceptions of principals and the teachers in three selected K12 schools on TPD in response to the education reforms implementation

ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online) https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/20.78.449

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020

in Vietnam using the data from the open-ended interviews with the principals, the questionnaires from teachers, and the school policy-related documents. The importance of TPD related closely to the general education reforms implementation at three schools was highly perceived and highly appreciated by the principals and teachers in similar vein. These made a strong link between their beliefs and TPD practices at their schools for promoting the education reforms.
Keywords: *education reforms, qualitative case-study, teacher professional development, Vietnamese K12 school*.

Introduction

Teacher professional development (herein after refered as TPD) is an integral part of the school strategic development policy. It has been believed to play a significant role in the education quality improvements in general education schools (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2011; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2016). In the last decades, three trends on TPD in the literature have been found as follows. First, the role of TPD has been recognized to be at least as important as pre-service lecturer training in terms of its impact on the quality of teaching (Hallinger et al., 2017; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Sparks, 2012; Timperly, 2011). Second, a traditional view of TPD involving the provision of in-service workshops and degree upgrading programs, has been replaced by more school-based learning activities (Harris & Jones, 2019; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009). Third, TPD is being now carried out learning communities (Little, 2012). Finally, TPD has been a central place in sustainable educational development policies (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2011; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2016; Fullan, 2011; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Qian & Walker, 2016; Tran et al., 2018; Tran et al., 2020).h h

The current research utilised a qualitative case-study research design whereby the perceptions of three principals and their teachers on the importance of lecturer professional development during the time of the current education reforms implementation were analyzed. Their perceptions expressed in the open-ended interviews and questionnaires were directly recorded, their practices at school were observed and related policy documents were examined to triangulate the data sources. The research sought principally to generate insights that might inform their perceptions and practices more widely in Vietnam's general education schools. The research also provided an opportunity to reflect critically on the global literature about the important roles of teacher professional development.

Literature Review

Three issues related to teacher professional development are examined in this literature review section. First, a number of definitions of teacher professional development are examined and links are made to the Vietnamese educational context. Next, the significance and purpose of teacher professional development are described, followed by characteristics of effective professional development.

Definition of Teacher Professional Development

The literature provides various definitions of staff development. According to the thesaurus of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, staff development refers to "activities to enhance professional career growth" (Cited in Lodiaga, 2002, p. 24). More specifically, teacher professional development includes those processes and activities designed to improve or enhance the professional job-related knowledge, skills, or attitudes of teachers so that they, in turn, can design instructional programmes to improve student learning

(Clement & Vandenberghe, 2011; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2016; Guskey, 2000; Qian et al., 2017). Such planned activities or processes may include individual development, continuing education, and in-service education, as well as curriculum writing, conferences, workshops, peer collaboration, study groups, and peer coaching or mentoring (Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), 2006; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2016; Newmann et al., 2013; Timperley, 2011; Vescio et al., 2008). Fullan (2011) expanded the definition to include "the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one's career from pre-service teacher education to retirement" (p. 326). In the opinion of Oliva and Pawlas (2003), staff development is a programme of activities planned and carried out to promote the personal and professional growth of teachers. Similarly, according to Lodiaga (2002), staff development is: "…the process of increasing or extending the capacity of staff - for performance of various duties. It could involve enrichment of an officer's capacity for performance in the current post, but it could also mean preparing an officer for another assignment into which he/she will be deployed after preparation" (p. 48). From the literature, it can be deduced that the broad meaning of staff professional development encompasses "a range of activities from individual teacher reading, to exploring a website, individual or group attendance at a conference, action research in the classroom, the curriculum implementation process particularly with groups, therefore generally including individual, as well as collaborative projects" (ATA, 2006, p. 46).

However, several researchers have used the terms 'staff development', 'teacher development', 'professional development', and 'in-service education' interchangeably to refer to any experience designed to enhance teacher performance with the ultimate aim of promoting student learning and achievement. In Vietnam, teacher professional development is considered to include any activities, both inside or outside schools, designed to help teachers improve and enhance their personal (moral qualities) and professional (including subject and pedagogical knowledge) growth with the ultimate aim of improving student achievement (For example, Kieu, 2003; MOET, 2012; Nguyen, 2009; Nguyen, 2013; Pham, 2001; Tran et al., 2020). In this study, staff professional development or teacher professional development will be widely and purposefully used to suggest "a process whereby teachers become more professional in both personal and professional qualities" (Dean, 2009, p. 5). It includes activities inside and outside the school (Qian et al., 2017; Timperley, 2011; Tran & Nguyen, 2019; Tran et al., 2018, 2020; Vescio et al., 2008).

Significance hand hPurposes hof hTeacher hProfessional hDevelopment

A teaching career is noble but increasingly challenging (Dean, 2009). Ridden (2008) also pointed out, "Teaching is a demanding job" (p. 30). It is more demanding today than ever before (Swafford, 2017). Teachers are expected to be not merely the providers of knowledge but the nurturers as well. In Vietnam, teachers are expected not only to provide their students with theoretical and practical knowledge but also to help their students to develop socially, culturally, physically and morally (Nguyen, 2009; Tran & Nguyen, 2019). They are required to have both "duc" (moral qualities) and "tai" (professional competency) (Tong, 2012; Tran et al., 2020). Successful teachers not only teach their students academic knowledge and skills needed for future career sucess but they also teach them how to live meaningful and useful lives.

The core purpose of the school is to provide high-quality learning experiences and opportunities for the students to grow to their potential (Bradley, 2015; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 2018; Tran et al., 2020).hThe ability of teachers to do this depends on teachers' knowledge, dispositions and attitudes (Newmann, et al., 2013). Thus, professional development for teachers has received attention from authorities, principals and teachers themselves (Bradley, 2015). Teachers' growth and development impinges upon student learning and achievement in particular and school improvement in general (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2011). DuThree and

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020

Eaker (2016) argued that, "The key to school improvement is people improvement. Attention to professional development must be the cornerstone of any initiative to enhance the effectiveness of schools" (p. 20). Likewise, Bradleyh (2015) maintained, "Any attempt to improve children's learning depends on some form of teacher growth" (p. 34). Sparks (2012) also stated that, "Quality teaching makes a difference in student learning… The professional learning of teachers is a central factor in determining the quality of teaching" (p. 1). Sergiovanni (2001) affirmed, "A consensus is emerging that teacher learning is a key ingredient in any attempt to improve schools" (p. 245).

Additionally, in the article "Make professional development a priority", Morrow (2018) affirmed, "Research also shows that excellent teachers are well-prepared teachers who continue to hparticipate in professional development during their careers" (p. 7). Never before has there been a greater recognition of the importance of professional development for teachers. Every proposal to reform, restructure, or transform schools emphasizes professional development as the primary vehicle in efforts to bring about needed change (Kaplan & Owings, 2009). Eshiwani (2015) advised that, because the improvement of education depends mainly on the improvement of teacher competency, there is a need for systematic upgrading and training programmes for teaching staff through long-term and short-term plans. Teachers need continuing professional development in order to maintain and upgrade their skills and to incorporate effective procedures. Kaplan and Owings (2009) recommended that:

> Teacher education must be seen as a gradual sequence of experiences in professional growth that begins at the initial stage at the college and is followed by further in-service training cycles. There must be continuity and reinforcement of training and growth throughout the teacher's career. (p. 25)

Teachers must continue learning throughout their lives, or they will soon become obsolete as Dean (2009) stated, "[C]ontent changes quickly, the information I teach today will not be the knowledge of tomorrow" (p. 59). Dean (2009) had a similar view when he states:

> Inhaddition to change cominghat us from government, we also have the changes resulting from the rapid development of hknowledge which is making existing knowledge out-of-date very quickly. A great deal that we are currently teaching in schools, if not already out-of-date, will become so in the very near future (2009, p. 1).

Bradley (2015) noted that, at a time of substantial pressure upon schools when teachers are reacting to changes in curriculum, changes in accountability and so on, the need for staff professional development is being recognized as of central importance. According to Bradley (2015), staff professional development has the following purposes:

> To make teachers feel valued in the job they do; To enable them to do this job well so that they receive the positive feedback essential for job satisfaction and for motivation; To help them to anticipate and prepare for changes in their work; To encourage them to derive excitement and satisfaction from their involvement in change, and to make them feel willing and competent to contribute constructively to the development of the school (p. 2).

Hence, "teachers have to constantly study and train in order to raise their quality, ethics, professional and specialty standard and set good examples to the learners" (TNPPH, 2019, p. 44). Similarly in Vietnam, Nguyen (2009), one of the first professors of Viet Nam pointed out:h

> Teachers have to learn everywhere, every time, from everyone, through every means. They should learn from both the better and least people, and know how tohlearn from themselves. Learning

https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/20.78.449 ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online)

> with the research method that means not receivinghthe knowledge passively, but knowing how to discover contradictions and problems and try to find solutions… Everyone should learn that way, has the key answer of success for teachers is to make the training process become the self-training one. Teachers themselves could not teach theirstudents to know how to hself-train unless they have a good method of hself-training. (Cited in Nguyen, 009. p. 397)

According to Wideen (2015), teacher professional development is needed for three reasons: "It offers better understanding and use of the expanded knowledge base in teaching; It provides insight in addressing continuing social complexities in school work; [and] It is a means of self- renewal" (p. 10).

Characteristics of Effective Teacher Professional Development

Many educators have endeavoured to clarify the characteristics of effective professional development (e.g., Desimone et al., 2008; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2018). Effective professional development experiences are designed to help teachers build new understandings of teaching and learning through direct experiences with strategies that help students learn in new ways (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hea-Jin, 2011; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 2018). According to Desimone et al. (2008), these characteristics of effective teacher professional development include a focus on contents and how students learn contents; in-depth, active learning opportunities; links to high standards, opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles; extended duration; and the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, grade, or department. In the words of Newmann et al. (2013), effective professional development "should concentrate on instruction and student outcomes in teachers' specific schools; provide opportunities for collegial inquiry, help, and feedback; and connect teachers to external expertise while also respecting teachers' discretion and creativity" (p. 259). Similarly, Loucks-Horsley et al. (2018) maintained that the principles that shape effective professional development experiences:

> Those are driven by ha hwell-defined image of effective classroom learning and teaching, provide opportunities for teachers to build their knowledge and skills, use or model with teachers the strategies teachers will use with their students, build a learning community,support teachers to serve in leadership roles, provide links to other parts of the education system, and they are continuously assessing themselves and making improvement to ensure positive impact on teacher effectiveness, student learning, and the school community (p. 268).

Many researchers suggested that an isolated or 'one-shot' event or professional development activity is not effective. Newmann et al. (2013) contended that professional development for teachers should be sustained and continuous, rather than short-term and episodic. Likewise, Guskey (2010) argued, in any successful change efforts, "[P]rofessional development is not an event that is separate from one's day-to-day professional responsibilities" (p. 38). Rather, professional development of teachers is "on going activity woven into the fabric of every teacher's professional life" (Guskey, 2010, p. 38). Professional development must provide a continuum of development experiences for individual teachers that address their needs in preparation programmes and their needs in advanced practice (Newmann et al., 2013; Pham, 2001; Tran et al., 2020). The best professional development involves collegial work settings, team teaching environments, school improvement networks, and school/university collaborative, such as professional development schools (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

It can be noted that, the above – suggested characteristics of effective professional development should be taken into consideration by relevant educational authorities to provide teachers with the optimal chance of hlearning. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2016)

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020

provided a number of questions to consider for those when designing effective professional development. Those include: "Does the professional development allow for adult learning? Does it hallow for teachers to construct their own meanings? Does it support the school as a community of lifelong learners?" (p. 34). It appears that these questions are important for educational authorities in the Vietnamese general education context to bear in mind when organizing strategies for their teachers' professional development. This above-mentioned information fits with the Vietnamese general education with a lot of current reforms implementation.

In order to promote the process of current general educational reforms, initiated by Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET), to make dramatic improvements in education hquality, teacher professional development can be regarded as a significant component in line with other factors such as good policies, curriculum renovations, educational leaders' compencies and so on. The significance of TPD should be highly appreciated by different educational leaders and stakeholders including the principals and teachers themselves which will promote the general education reforms much better. The context for the present research is three schools including a primary, a lower-secondary and an upper-secondary school in a province in Central Vietnam. The research question was: "How doprincipals and teachers in three schools of general education level in Central Vietnam perceive the significance of teacher professional development in response to the current education reforms implementation?"

Research Methodology

General Background

A qualitative case study research design (Yin, 2014) was used for this research as a basis for outlining perceptions of principals and teachers related closely to the current education reforms in Vietnam. Qualitative research focuses on and tries to make sense of phenomena in natural and specific situations and/or settings to understand through looking closely at people's actions, words and records (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 2015). This qualitative case study design is to make this study exploratory-explanatory (Yin, 2014). Trustworthiness for the study data collection is ensured by the triangulation of data sources including the interview with three principals, questionnaires with the teachers, observations of TPD activities at their schools and document analysis, the credibility (member hchecks with the confirmation of interview contents collected with the principals) as triangulation is used to confirm the validity of the processes, strengthen the credibility of our research findings (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015; Stake, 2000) and "reveal multiple interpretations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 124) and the audit trail, as recommended by Patton (2015). The sample selection, methods of data collection and methods of data analysis for the research will be described.

Sample Selection

This researchhtook place in Hong Ngu (pseudonym) Province in the centre of Vietnam. Purposeful sampling was utilized in this research to select "information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2015, p.169). Three schools from three educational levels in different geographical locations in Hong Ngu province were considered to gain high achievements by Hong Ngu Provincial Department of Education and Training. Their characteristics were as follows:

- School A: This primary school A has 600 students in 15 classes from grades 1-5 in the city. Principal Co Nguyen (pseudonym) leads 23 staff including a deputy principal. The primary School A has been recognized for excellence in academic and moral achievements at the provincial level. Eighteen teachers hold three-year and four-year bachelor's degrees. The Principal has 15 years of experience as a hprincipal including twelve years at this school. Before being appointed to this post, she had been a teacher for three hyears and deputy-principal for seven years.

https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/20.78.449 ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online)

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020

- SchoolhB:hThis lower-secondaryhschool B located inha ruralharea serving 950 students in grades 6-9. It has been recognized for excellence in academic achievement. There are 62 staff members including the principal and deputy principal. The principal, Thay Tien (pseudonym), has 10 years of experience as a principal. Sixty of the teaching staff have three-year or four year training degrees.
- Schoolh C: This upper-secondary school C (grades 10-12) has 900 students from different parts of the city. Approximately 100 percent of the 12th grade students pass the university entrance examination every year to get admission to different universities in Vietnam. There are around 73 staff members including the principal, Thay Tho (pseudonym), and two deputy-principals. There are 70 teachers of whom one holds a PhD degree, seven hold M. A degrees, the rest ave four-year raining diplomas (bachelors' degrees).

The principals were identified as being important persons to interview in terms of expressing their perceptions and beliefs toward their teacher professional development and make those beliefs into action for promoting TPD. These three principals were important also because the permission was required to distribute questionnaires to their teachers. One hundred and fifty teachers at three schools (A, B, and C) were invited to complete the questionnaires.

Data Collection

Data resulted from semi-structured interviews with the three principals, open-ended questionnaires distributed to teachers, and direct observations of TPD strategies at the schools. Semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2015) sought to obtain information about the three principals' perspectives and their leadership practices and about the importances of TPD strategies organized for their teachers. Teachers' perceptions were expressed in response to an open-ended questionnaire that focused on their views on significance of the professional development practices related to education reforms requirements applied at the school for them. One hundred and fifty questionnaires were randomly distributed to teachers at school meetings, of which 124 were returned (an 82.6% response rate). To obtain further detail, and to check on what had been reported by three principals and their teachers, we also observed TPD strategies over a three-month period. These observations provided additional insights and they contributed to the process of triangulation as a means of assuring the credibility of the findings reported (Patton, 2015). Before the data collection process was conducted, consent forms had been sent to the principals th and participants for their approval and voluntary participation in this research, as anhimportant step of ensuring ethical considerations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Data Analysis

In this multi-sitehcase study, we employed 'within-case analysis' followed by 'cross-case analysis' (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2015). Within-case analysis involved developing detailed write-ups for each school according to the foci of the research. Analytical procedures first involved coding data based on sources. First, the interview transcripts and teachers' responses to the questionnaire were readhin order to form initial codes. Next, the codes were related to the notes of TPD activities made by the investigator-in-chief plus the policy documents. Finally, the data were organised by arranging it into a case record (or database) for each school (Patton, 2015).

In the cross-case analysis, we tried "to build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases vary in their details" (Yin, 2014, p. 112). During the process of data synthesis, open coding, axial coding and constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Patton, 2015) were used to generate the list of ideas and perceptions emerged

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020

there. The categories were generated searching for patterns, commonalities and contradictions among the three schools (Patton, 2015).

Research Results

Perceptions of the Significance of TPD at Primary School A

The quality of the teaching staff was recognized as significant to the development of the school and the success of children by the principal and the teachers. Co Nguyen the principal stated:

> *The teaching staff play a very important role in the development of the success of a school in general and children in particular… For me, as usual the childrens' intelligent capacities account for 70 percent and teachers' role only takes up 30 percent of the childrens' success and achievements. However, if the 30 percent is not of good quality, the 70 percent will be wasted and would be not as developed as desired*. (Interview with Co Nguyen, school A principal, referred to as ANI).

The selected teachers agreed with the principal. One teacher wrote, "*Our people say that without the teacher, you cannot fully understand anything. We are direct people disseminating knowledge to children. Thus, we must first be professionally competent. We must also set a good example for our students*" (Teacher questionnaire 4, school A - referred to as AT4). According to them, the quality of teachers was especially important for the hprimary education level because the all round development of primary children depended very much on the quality of their teachers. One teacher even wrote, "*Teachers' quality might also have an impact on students' later development*" (AT9).

In summary, professional development of teachers as been considered a vital factor for the improvement of teaching quality and results in student achievement, by both the principal and teachers. Teachers wanted to engage in professional development activities to improve their teaching. Ultimately, many teachers wrote that '*All is for our dear students*'. According to the principal, in order to produce students with good knowledge, "*teachers must wait in front and continually improve their professional development in terms of subjects and teaching method knowledge, and morality, to satisfy the ever-increasing needs of society and schools*" (ANI). Co Nguyen the principal even emphasized that,

> *The professional development of teachers is to supplement additional knowledge and skills for teachers until that time and on that basis, to enrich those teachers themselves because Vietnamese often say 'to learn and understand ten, but just teach one… Teachers cannot help learning and practising and teachers especially cannot lag behind their students… It is necessary to upgrade and continually update or teachers will become out of date…The improvement and professional development of teachers is vital, especially during this time of general education reforms initiated by MOET. It is like a heart beating every second. If the heart ceases beating, life will stop. In my perceptions, it is the same as teachers' professional development. If teachers are satisfied with all the knowledge and techniques learnt from colleges and universities without a commitment to upgrade them, those teachers would train the young people who would only know to use available experiences, instead of having an ability to continually explore a problem critically and to be creative in any circumstances… Students will be more likely to become life-long learners when their teachers are good at self-training and keen on continuous learning. A Vietnamese motto in education is that 'each teacher must set a good example for his/her students to learn from'.* (ANI)

Perceptions of the Significance of Lover-Secondary School B

The significance of a quality teaching staff was recognized by Thay Tien- the principal and the teachers who acknowledged the important role of good teachers in students' learning and achievements for meeting all the requirements of current education reforms. They repeated a popular Vietnamese saying that 'khong co thay do may lam nen'(You cannot be successful witout the teacher's help). The principal, Thay Tien, even stated that"*I want to affirm again that there could not be good students without good teachers…And quality teaching staff play a decisive role in the quality and success of students, that results in the school achievements during the current education reforms*" (Interview with Thay Tien, the Lover-Secondary School B principal, hereafter referred to as BTI). A female teacher with twenty-six years of teaching experience, while having the same idea, also elaborated upon the concept of the good teacher in the Vietnamese setting:

> *The quality of teaching staff impacts on students. For me, it seems a cause-effect rule that having good teachers results in having good students. Nevertheless, good teachers are good in terms of both professional knowledge and moral character. Those kinds of good teachers can produce students with both knowledge, and professional skill and good character who can serve for the good of the country.* (Teacher questionnaire number 4, school B, referred to as BT4)

Teachers' professional development has been taken more seriously in recent years, as stated by Thay Tien the principal. According to Thay Tien and most teachers, teacher professional development was a regular activity in this school and it contributed to improving the quality of teaching and learning. "*During the educational reform, specifically the textbook replacement for grade six and seven at lower-secondary education and teaching methodology reform, the need for professional development of teachers is increasingly becoming necessary*" (BTI). As Thay Tien the principal explained, "*if teachers do not have continual professional development, they will lag behind and will not meet requirements as stipulated by MOET and Education Law, especially the current reforms changes*" (BTI). All teachers had similar views and they themselves realized this. They considered professional development to be something they needed, something they had a right to, and something they were responsible for. Many statements, such as "*participating in professional development strategies as improved my professionalism. I do it first for my job, then requirements from the school or MOET for facilitating the success of current education reforms*" (BT2), can be found in teachers' questionnaires. One teacher even noted, "…*It[professional development] helps me preserve the honour of a good teacher*" (BT5).

Perceptions of the Significance of TPD at Upper-secondary school C

Like the other two principals, Thay Tho the principal recognized the connection between the quality of teachers and improvement and successes of students that result in the success of current general education reforms. The same statement 'khong co thay do may lam nen' (you cannot be successful without the teachers' help) was stated in his interview. Thay Tho the principal elaborated:

> *As for me, the quality of any teaching staff is of course very important to the quality of education or in other words, to the success, studying results, and practice of students. Although the decisive factor depends first on each pupil's efforts, teachers have an important and direct impact on the quality of each pupil, so that the education reforms can achieve their objectives as desired.* (Interview with Thay Tho, School C, referred to as CTI)

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020

All teachers agreed with the principal. When answering the question 'what is your perception of the teacher's role for his/her students' success?', many adjectives such as 'important', 'significant', 'very important', 'specially important' are in the questionnaires. Significantly, five out of eight teachers use the adjective 'decisive' in their answers and the statement 'co thay gioi thi at se co tro gioi'(good teachers will surely produce better students) is found in many teachers' questionnaires.

The quality of teachers is paid special attention to by local government authorities and the school management board, because the students' achievements at national and international level bring fame and prestige not only to themselves, their parents, their families, but also to the school and the province as a whole. Those achievements can include the number of students attaining 'National Good Pupil' title, the percentage of students getting entry to universities, and other national or international rewards. According to the principal, sometimes, the achievements of individual students can make the whole nation aware of this school and province. For example; Tran Hoang Nam(pseudonym) got a gold medal in the 2010 International Mathematical Olympiad in Korea; Trinh Kim Chi got a gold medal in the South East Asian Nations' First Maths Contest in 1999 and was recognized as one of the most outstanding young people of the year; and Ho Ngoc Han and Ho Dac Thanh Chuong were the champions of the National h"Road to Mount Olympia" competition in 2012 and 2016.

According to Thay Tho the principal, since the school was established, a lot of famous alumi such as the Late President of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, Tran Phu as the first general secretary of the Vietnam communist party, Ngo Dinh Diem as the first president of Vietnam Repubic in the South, Tran Hoan as the musician and hundreds of other reputed figures. Thus, the teachers at this upper-secondary school are considered the best and most experienced teachers. For many years, they have been recognized as skilled in their specialized subjects. They are also experienced in training excellent students to achieve a lot of international and national awards and a lot of students got scholarships to study overseas. In recent years, several experienced teachers were retired and young university graduates with distinction qualifications ave been selected and recommended by PETS (Provincial Department of Education and Training) to positions at the school. However, this school has the right to interview and test suggested graduates before approving the PETS' recommendation and this is a priority only for this upper-secondary school. Those recommended candidates have to take two tests. The first two-our written test is to assess the graduates' professional major subjects. The second relates to teaching methodology. Each candidate presents two lessons to be observed and assessed by a school panel of three of the most experienced teachers. The candidates with the best results are employed as permanent teachers at the school.

Even though the standard of teaching is higher than other schools, the teachers and principal still aim for improvement. Thay Tho noted, "*The staff are not satisfied with the present achievements. Based on the basis of good quality teacher input, we need to have more professional development to upgrade our knowledge and skills to meet the requirements of these reforms*" (CTI). Teachers wrote that good students in this school were both an advantage hand challenge for them. They had to strive more to meet their students' needs of learning.

Professional development for teachers is recognized as an integral part of the teaching profession, by both the principal and teachers. This is "*more important for teachers during the current educational reform*" (CTI). Textbook replacement and teaching method reform are being carried out at grade one at the primary education level from 2020, at the secondary education level from 2021 and from 2020 for upper-secondary school level. To anticipate these changes, teachers have to be carefully prepared. Thay Tho the principal explains:

> *To master the new curriculum, textbooks, and teaching methods for improved teaching, teachers play an active part…New curriculum is associated with new teaching method. Thus, in order to teach better, teachers must continually improve their professional capacities and update their new knowledge…If teachers are not provided with good professional development, they cannot keep*

https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/20.78.449 ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online)

up to date with the changes within the current reforms and therefore cannot satisfy requirements and fulfill their responsibilities. (CTI)

In general, all teachers provided similar reasons why teacher professional development is more important during this period. The statement 'professional development is obviously important to the success of students in this school, especially during the educational reforms" seems to be repeated by almost all teachers. One male teacher with seven years' teaching experience even elaborates:

As usual, we as teachers at this school also have to continually improve our knowledge in order to teach such intelligent students. During the educational reform, specific reforms of curriculum, textbooks, and teaching method put higher requirements on teachers. Especially, new knowledge in textbooks and the new teaching method called student-centred approach are really challenging us. We have to change, as a result, to improve our knowledge and skills. In order to do so, we should continue to have good professional development. Thus, professional development is most important to us as teachers. (Teacher questionnaire 1, school C, referred to as CT1)

Discussion

The principals and teachers in the three schools were all aware of the value of teachers' professional development to the effectiveness of teaching staff. Although the three schools represented different education levels in the Vietnamese educational system, they all regarded teachers' professional development as very important for student learning and students' achievements. International research also related teachers' development and improvement to students' learning and achievement (See, for example, Darling-Hammond& McLaughlin, 2016; Fullan, 2011; Qian et al., 2017).

The principals all appeared to realize that professional development for their teachers was an integral factor to the maintenance and promotion of quality teaching and learning. They all mentioned a link between 'good teachers' and 'good students'. They sometimes expressed it differently. Co Nguyen, the Primary School A principal, compared the significance of professional development for teachers as the heart of a person. According to er, in order to help teachers preserve their exemplary models as life-long learners, teachers first had to be keen on continuous learning. For very young children at primary schools, teachers are more likely to be considered as students' 'mothers at school' (Nguyen, 2013). Thus, teachers' learning and improvement seems to have a more direct impact upon such student development. Teachers can leave a life-long imprint on their students (Nguyen, 2009). Thay Tien, from the Lover-secondary School B, suggested a causal relationship between good teachers and good students and concluded that professional development is needed for teachers to help them meet the requirements of MOET. Thay Tho, the Upper-secondary School C principal, emphasized that relationship because his school is for such excellent students, and teachers have to train those students for many competitions in their specialized subjects. All of the three principals considered teachers' professional development more important during the current educational reform. These seem to confirm what previous researchers found out (for example, Kaplan& Owings, 2009; Tran& Nguyen, 2019; Tran et al., 2020). They also argue that professional development for teachers is a primary vehicle in the effort to carry out the education reforms successfully. These principals' understanding of the educational changes in general education reforms in Vietnam indicated their leadership capacity, as Fullan (2011) noted.

Overall, almost all the teachers of the three schools agreed with their principals. They were conscious of the important role of continual learning to their improvement and their job requirements. The teachers emphasized the need for professional development to allow them to meet the requirements and promote the success of educational reforms. Most teachers seemed to realize their strange position of being 'simultaneously both the subject and the agent of

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020

changes of the educational reforms' (Fullan, 2011; MOET, 2012). The teachers of the three schools all expressed a desire to learn the new teaching methods and understand the newly-printed textbooks. They generally wanted to master a learner-centred approach and apply it successfully to their classes.

Almost all teachers wrote of their own motivation before making a mention of requirements and request from MOET, Education Law, and their principals. Internal commitment was also highlighted in the international literature (See, for example, Fullan, 2011; Sparks& Loucks-Horsley, 2018). It happears that the tradition of 'ton su trong dao'(respecting teachers), the desire of preserving the honour of the teaching profession(Tong, 2012), and maintaining and improving their own fame and prestige, have also motivated the teachers towards professional development. In general, the teachers regarded professional development as important for them because it could help them to develop 'tai' in parallel with 'duc'.

In general, the three principals and all 124 teachers from three schools realized the significance of teachers' professional development on the quality of teaching and for an enhancement of students' learning and success opportunities the current general education reforms implementation. Newmann et al. (2013) argue that the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers as individuals are obviously important and can make a difference in individual classrooms. The three principals and all of their 124 teachers highly appreciated TPD during the time of the current educational reforms in Vietnam as essential. An understanding of the causal relationship between 'good teachers' and 'good students' was evident in all the principals' interviews and almost all 124 teachers' questionnaires. These beliefs are consistent with Western literature (See, for example, Clement& Vandenberghe, 2011; Darling-Hammond& McLaughlin, 2016; Fullan, 2011; Lieberman& Pointer Mace, 2008; Sparks, 2012; Qian et al., 2017; Sergiovanni, 2001) and previous studies in the Vietnamese context(Tran al., 2018; Tran et al., 2020).

Research Limitations

There are a number of limitations of this research. Firstly, like other qualitative case study research, this involved a limited and specific population of participants as a single case study. The findings of this research could not be generalized to a larger population. Secondly, differences in culture and language created certain barriers in conveying the participants' and the researchers' ideas. Though the meanings of original ideas of the participants were kept faithful and clear, the original Vietnamese language styles and contexts were more or less changed due to translation. English equivalents for several Vietnamese words or phrases could not be found in the English language. As Vasavakul (2019) argued wherever ideas are translated from one language and culture to another it is impossible to be sure that the words have precisely the same meaning for the two people involved. Thus, explanation was sometimes required. Thirdly, we, as researchers, were also a research instrument (Patton, 2015).

Conclusions

Overall, Western literature was useful in the Vietnamese educational setting to the extent that the current implementation of general education reforms in Vietnam in general and in each school in particular, favours student-centred learning and active participation by students in order to develop student future creativity and skills needed for the needs of the labour market. These things are often taken for granted in modern Western models. All the three principals and almost all of their teachers recognized the significance of TPD related closely to the current general educational reforms, initiated by MOET, including TPD for curriculum innovations, subject knowledge updates, and teaching methods. These perceptions will offer a good premise for the sucessful implementation of the educational reforms at those schools and in the wider context in Vietnam.

https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/20.78.449 ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online)

This research was conducted both to fill the gap in knowledge of perceptions of TPD in the Vietnamese context and to add to a growing world literature. The research also reinforces earlier descriptive efforts to outline lecturer professional learning perspectives in Western countries.

The need for teachers to grow, adapt and develop new professional subject knowledge and teaching method/research skills at this time to meet the requirements of successful implementation of the general education reforms, initiated by MOET, as reinforced the importance of TPD as the development strategy of MOET, and each school plan in the future.

Acknowledgelment

This research is funded by University of Education, Hue University, Vietnam under grant number T.20 – GD.NCM – 01.

References

Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). (2006). *Professional development programs and service book*. Alberta.

Bennedsen, J., Edström, K., Kuptasthien, N., Lauritsen, A. B., Roslöf, J., & Songer, R. (2019). *Editorial.* In Edström, K., Kuptasthien, N. (Eds), *Proceedings of the 15th International CDIO Conference* (pp. 76-89). Denmark: Dahur University. https://doi.org/10.7146/aul.347

Bradley, H. (2015). *Staff development*. The Falmer Press.

Clement, M., & Vandenberghe, R. (2011). How school leaders can promote teachers' professional development. *School Leadership and Management*, *21*(1), 43-57.

Creswell, W. J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th Ed.). Sage.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Professional development for teachers. [Electronic version]. *Pathways to School Improvement*. http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/profdevl/pd2prof.htm

Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. W. (2016). Policies hat support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *96*(8). http://globalvgw.global.epnet.com/get_xml.asp

Dean, J. (2009). *Professional development in school*. Open University Press.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *Handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.

Desimone, L. M., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Yoon, K. S., & Birman, B. F. (2008). Effects of professional development on teachers' instruction: Results from a three - year longitudinal study. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *24*(2), 81-113.

DuThree, R., & Berkey, T. (1995). The principal as staff developer. *Journal of Staff Development*, *16* (4), 2-6.

Dzung, V. A. (2012). *Implementing CDIO approach to BA Honour Programs of International Economics.* Ha Noi, Vietnam: Ha Noi National University. http://fibe.ueb.edu.vn/en/Academics/Teaching-and Studying/CDIO-Initatives/Essence-and-properties-of-the-original-CDIO-process.ápx

Eshiwani, G. S. (2015). *Education in Kenya since independence*. East African Educational Publishers.

Fullan, M. (2011). *Leading in a culture of change*. Jossey Bass.

Guskey, T. R. (2010). *Evaluating professional development*. Sage.

Hai Binh. (2019). A higher education institution from Vietnam has been accepted to be an international CDIO Association member. *Newspaper of Education and Times*. https://giaoducthoidai.vn/giao-duc/hiep-hoi-cdio-quoc-te-tiep-nhan-them-thanh-vien-la-truong-dh-viet-nam-3919108-v.html

Hallinger, P., & Liu. S. (2016). Leadership and teacher learning in urban and rural schools in China: Meeting the dual challenges of equity and effectiveness. *International Journal of Educational Development, 51*, 163-173. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.10.001

Hallinger, P., Piyaman, P., & Viseshsiri, P. (2017). Assessing the effects of learning-centered leadership on teacher professional learning in Thailand. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *67*, 464-476. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.07.008

Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2019). Leading professional learning with impact. *School Leadership and Management*, *39*(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1530892

Hea-Jin, L. (2011). Enriching the professional development of mathematics teachers. *ERIC Digest, ED 465495*.

Kaplan, L. S., & Owings, W. A. (2009). Teacher quality and student achievement: Recommendations for principals. *National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Bulletin*, *85*(28), 64-73.

Little, J. W. (2012). Professional community and professional development in the learning-centered school. In M. Kooy & K. van Veen (Eds.) *Language Teacher learning that matters: International perspectives* (pp. 22-46). Routledge.

Lodiagia, J. (2002). Staff and development. In Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Ed.), *Report of the Educational Administration Conference 21-25 April* (pp. 48-53). Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

London, J. D. (2011). Contemporary Vietnam's education system: Historical roots, current trends. *Education in Vietnam, 3*(5), 45-65.

Loucks-Horsley, S., Stiles, K. E., Love, N., & Hewson, P. W. (2018). *Designing professional development for teachers of science and mathematics.* Corwin Press.

Malmqvist, J., Edström, K., & Hugo, R. (2017). A proposal for introducing optional CDIO standards. *Proceedings of the 13th International CDIO Conference*, Calgary, Canada.

Lieberman, A., & Pointer Mace, D. H. (2008). Language teacher learning: The key to educational reform. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *59*(3), 226-234.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994*). Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide*. The Falmer Press.

Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). (2012). *Vietnamese education and training development strategy plan for 2015-2020 for the cause of industrialization and modernization of Vietnam*. Education Publishing House.

Morrow, L. M. (2018). Make professional development a priority. *Reading Today*, *21*(1), 6-10.

Newmann, F., King, B., & Youngs, P. (2013). Professional development that addresses school capacity: A lessons from urban elementary schools. *American Journal of Education*, *108*(4), 259-299.

Nguyen, C. T. (2009). On the good teacher. Educational Research Review, February, 2009. In C. T. Nguyen (2009), (Ed.), *The corpus of discussions on education* (pp. 390-398). Labour Publishing House.

Nguyen, D. (2013). Fostering quality teaching and school managers thru professional growth plans to keep pace with the policies on educational curriculum innovation at high schools in Tay Ninh province. *Education Review*, *46*, 39-40. (in Vietnamese)

Opfer, V. D., & Pedder, D. (2011). Conceptualizing teacher professional learning. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(3), 376-407.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

Pham, H. H. (2001). Teacher development: A real need for English departments in Vietnam. *The English Teaching Forum*, *39* (4), 30-36.

Qian, H., Walker, A. D., & Yang, X. (2017). Building and leading a learning culture among teachers: A case study of a Shanghai primary school. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 45*(1)*,* 101-122. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143215623785

Qian, H., & Walker, A. D. (2013). How Rectors promote and understand teacher development under curriculum reform in China. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *41*(3), 304-315.

Rosenblum, S., Seashore, L. K., & Rossmiller, R. (1994). School leadership and teacher quality of work life. In J. Murphy, & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Reshaping the principalship: Insights from transformational reform efforts* (pp. 99 - 102). Corwin Press.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (2001). *The principalship: A reflective practice perspectiv*e (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.

Somprach, K., Tang, K. N., & Popoonsak, P. (2016). The relationship between school leadership and professional learning communities in Thai basic education schools. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, *2*(16), 157-175.

Sparks, D. (2012). *Designing powerful professional development for teachers and principals.* http://www.nsdc.org/sparksbook.html

Sparks, D., & Loucks-Horsley, S. (2018). Five models of staff development for teachers. *Journal of Staff Development*, *10*(4), 40-57.

Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds*.), Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 236 - 248). Sage.

Swarfford, J. (2017). Teachers supporting teachers through peer coaching. *Support for Learning*, *13*(2), 54-58.

The National Politics Publishing House (TNPPH). (2013). *Hien Phap nuoc Cong Hoa Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Viet Nam (Sua doi)* (*The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam - Amended*). The National Politics Publishing House.

The National Politics Publishing House. (2019). *Luat Giao Duc* (*The Education Law)*. The National Politics Publishing House.

Timperley, H. (2011). *Realizing the power of professional learning*. McGraw-Hill Education.

Tong, D. T. (2012). Teachers' legal status in Viet Nam education law. *Tap Chi Giao Duc (The Educational Review)*, *44*, 12-14.

Tran, H. N., & Nguyen, T. H. T. (2019). Implemented activities of English language teachers' professional development: A case study in Hong Linh province in Vietnam. *The International Journal of Adult, Community and Professional Learning, 26*(2), 27-41. https://doi.org/10.18848/2328-6318/CGP/v26i02/27-41

Tran, H. N., Hallinger, P., & Truong, D. T. (2018). The heart of school improvement: A multi-site case study of leadership for teacher learning in Vietnam. *School Leadership and Management*, *38*(1), 80-101. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1371690

Tran, H. N., Nguyen, D. C., Nguyen, G. V., Ho, T. N., Bui, T. Q. T., & Hoang, N. H. (2020). Workplace conditions created by principals for their teachers' professional development in Vietnam. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1708472

Trinh, D. T. M., & Khiem, D. N. (2012). Suggestions for output standards based on CDIO program for some undergraduate training majors in HCM National University. In H. N. University (Ed.), *Meeting Society Needs and Global Integration.* HCM National University.

Vasavakul, T. (2019). *Vietnam: A Pathway from State Socialism*. Cambridge University Press.

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*, 80-91.

Wallenberg, F. (2016). Wallenberg CDIO Documents. http://www.cdio.org/Wallenberg_docs/wallenberg_docs.html

Wang, T. (2016). School leadership and professional learning community: Case study of two senior high schools in Northeast China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 202-216.

Webster-Wright, A. (2009). Reframing professional development through understanding authentic professional learning. *Review of Educational Research, 79*(2), 702-739.

Wee, C. (2010). *What is CDIO?* The Educator: For Educators, By Educators: http://educator.sp.edu.sg/2010/04/25/what-is-cdio/

Wideen, M. F. (2015). Perspectives on staff development in developing countries: A personal view. *The Journal of Educational Administration*, *26*(3), 382-392.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Received: *March 28, 2020* Accepted: *June 04, 2020*

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 78, No. 3, 2020

Cite as: Tran, H. N., Truong, D. T., Dinh, T. V. H., Do, T. L. H., Tran, T. T. A., & Phan, T. M. H. (2020). Significance of teacher professional development in response to the current general education reforms in Vietnam: Perceptions of school principals and teachers. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, *78*(3), 449-464. https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/20.78.449

Ngoc Hai Tran	Assistant to Rector/Senior Lecturer, Institute of Continuing Education, Ha Tinh University, No 447, 26March St., Ha Tinh city, Vietnam. E-mail: haingoc74@gmail.com ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3326-1365
Thang Dinh Truong	PhD, Acting Rector, Quang Tri College of Education, Dong Ha city, Quang Tri province, VietNam. E-mail: thangnewzealand@yahoo.com ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0699-0733
Hong-Van Thi Dinh *(Corresponding author)*	PhD, Vice-Dean, Department of Psychology and Education, University of Education, Hue University, No 32, Le Loi st, Hue city, Vietnam. E-mail: dinhthihongvan@dhsphue.edu.vn ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1665-9083
Le-Hang Thi Do	PhD, Senior Researcher, Insitute of Psychology, Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences, No 37, Kim Ma Thuong St, Hanoi city, Vietnam. E-mail: dothilehang@gmail.com ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0038-9306
Tu-Anh Thi Tran	PhD, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychology and Education, University of Education, Hue University, No 32, Le Loi st, Hue city, Vietnam. E-mail: tranthituanh@dhsphue.edu.vn ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5455-2044
Mai-Huong Thi Phan	PhD, Associate Professor, Senior Researcher, Insitute of Psychology, Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences, No 37, Kim Ma Thuong St, Hanoi city, Vietnam. E-mail: huongphanmai@gmail.com ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5759-2906