DEVELOPMENT OF A TEAM OF KEY TEACHERS AT LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ACCORDANCE TO COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Key teachers in lower secondary schools are essential to driving comprehensive and fundamental education and training reform, as well as to the specific development of new educational programs. The current study clarifies key issues regarding teachers at lower secondary schools and their development requirements, and proposes six solutions for enhancing the competence-based development of key teachers at lower secondary schools in Vietnam. These solutions include increasing awareness among teachers and staff of the importance of key teacher development activities, designing a development plan for key teachers that is tailored to the school size and teacher capacity, identifying and utilizing a pool of competent key teachers at lower secondary schools, assessing their performance, and creating favorable conditions for their growth and development. The study proposes several implications for developing key teachers at lower secondary schools in Vietnam using a competence-based approach.

KEYWORDS: Competence-based approach; key teachers, lower secondary schools; developing key teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the era of international integration, the establishment of quality education is a crucial factor in driving and sustaining the development of every country. Vietnam is a developing country that is actively pursuing integration, with a strong commitment to prioritizing investment in education as a key national policy. In response to the demand for fundamental and comprehensive education and training reform, the Government of Vietnam has prioritized the development of a competent workforce of teachers, officials, civil servants, and education administrators, focusing on enhancing objectives, content, training methods, and evaluation of learning outcomes. These efforts aim to improve the quality, responsibility, ethics, and capacity of these professionals to carry out their duties effectively (Vietnamese Government, 2012). The development of general education staff, especially key teachers at lower secondary schools, is a fundamental factor in creating the necessary conditions to drive education and training reform (Pham, 2001; Wise, 2000).

Conducting a study on the current situation and proposing measures to develop key teachers at lower secondary schools using the competence-based approach will primarily enhance the quality of capacity building activities for these teachers. This will, in turn, improve their competence and elevate the overall quality of teaching at lower secondary schools to meet the demands of fundamental and comprehensive educational reform in Vietnam.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF KEY TEACHERS AT LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS USING THE COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH

Key teachers at lower secondary schools are educators with strong moral character, a deep understanding of the education landscape, exceptional professional skills and knowledge, and a respected status within the school community. They possess the ability to advise, support, lead, and collaborate with colleagues in both professional activities and capacity development training (Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, 2018; Wilson et al., 2001). Competence is the basic characteristic of an individual; it is causally related to high efficiency compared to the standards that the individual achieves in work or a situation (Fletcher, 1991). It is the ability to perform tasks or roles in accordance with expected standards or as a group of essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes to achieve the level of efficiency accepted in work practice (Hooper et al., 2014).

In other words, competence is the ability to establish a relationship between knowledge and the situation, including the subjective meaning of the situation. Ability is an expression of competence, demonstrated by the capacity to complete a specific activity to a high standard in a particular situation (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000). The above analysis suggests that the competence-based approach in education involves identifying a specific set of competence standards that correspond to the learner's training program, and then determining appropriate ways and methods to form and develop that system of competence for learners (Teodorescu, 2006; Thomas & Silke, 2011).

The development of lower secondary teachers is critical in terms of both quantity and quality. However, the approach to developing lower secondary teachers differs from that of meeting the higher quality requirements needed to train these teachers effectively (Pham, 2001; Wise, 2000). Developing key lower secondary teachers using a competence-based approach is a strategic management activity aimed at advancing this team in terms of quantity, structure, and, most importantly, quality (both in terms of proficiency and capacity). This is necessary to meet the emerging educational development requirements (Van et al., 2001). Establishing and nurturing a competent team of key teachers, particularly at the lower secondary level, is a fundamental component of national education reform and development efforts (Danielson, 2001). Numerous studies have focused on the management and development of teachers in general, as well as key teachers at lower secondary schools across various regions worldwide (Ganser, 2000; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Steven, 2012; Teodorescu, 2006). These studies emphasize the evolving role of teachers in the new era as designers, organizers, cheerleaders, and pioneers.

The quality of teachers is a key factor in determining the overall quality of education. In particular, having highly skilled and competent teachers is essential to ensuring high-quality education (Vietnamese Government, 2012). To ensure high-quality education, it is essential that teachers possess a range of professional capacities, including a deep understanding of subject content, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of child development, awareness of diversity, insight into motivation, knowledge of learning processes, mastery of teaching strategies, understanding of student assessment, knowledge of curriculum and technology, appreciation of collaborative efforts, analytical abilities, and reflective practices in teaching (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2014) (Wanzare & Costa, 2000).

Professional development of teachers using a competence-based approach is an area of significant interest to many countries, with a focus on investing in research and the application of research findings in this field. Employers do not necessarily need to be concerned about where their workers are trained, what content is covered, or how long the training takes, as long as the workers have the capacity to fulfill the job requirements and meet the necessary production quality standards (UNESCO, 1998). In recent years, as demands for quality education have intensified, research on developing key teachers at lower secondary schools using the competence-based approach has been conducted from the perspective of educational management at both macro and micro levels in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2004; Nguyen, 2006; Tran, 2004).

3. THE NEED OF DEVELOPING KEY TEACHERS AT LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS USING COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH

Requirements of Comprehensive Fundamental Renovation of Education and Training
The comprehensive and fundamental reform of education and training requires addressing critical and urgent issues, ranging from perspectives, guiding principles, objectives, content, methods, policies, and conditions to ensure successful implementation. These reforms require innovative leadership from the Party, effective state management, and the active participation of educational institutions, families, communities, society, and learners themselves across all levels and disciplines (Party Central Committee, 2013). Developing key secondary school teachers is a critical step in addressing the aforementioned critical and urgent issues. The Central Executive Committee's resolution emphasizes that planning and developing training and retraining programs for teachers and educational managers must align with the needs of socio-economic development, national defense and security, and international integration efforts (Party Central Committee, 2013).

Requirements of renovation of general education curriculum and textbooks
The National Assembly of Vietnam's Resolution No. 88/2014/QH13 on the renovation of general education curricula and textbooks emphasizes the need to fundamentally and comprehensively improve the quality and effectiveness of general education. The resolution highlights the importance of integrating literacy teaching, character education, and career orientation to facilitate the holistic development of students' qualities and capacities, including virtues, wisdom, physical fitness, and aesthetics, and to promote the best potential of each student (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2014). To achieve these goals, the general

education curriculum must be streamlined, modern, practical, age-appropriate, and tailored to career orientations, with a focus on increasing hands-on learning and knowledge application. The curriculum should be highly integrated in lower grades and gradually differentiated in upper grades (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2014). Textbooks play a crucial role in concretizing the requirements of the general education curriculum regarding educational content, quality and capacity of students, educational methods, and methods of testing and evaluating the quality of education (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2014). To effectively develop the qualities and capacities of learners and achieve the educational objectives of each level, it is essential for key teachers to be proactive, flexible, and creative in applying national and local programs that are suitable for the unique characteristics of their students and school environments. By doing so, key teachers can contribute to the successful implementation of the comprehensive and fundamental education and training innovation effort.

Requirements for changing the role of school teachers in the new context
Meeting the demands of educational innovation in the context of the 4th industrial revolution requires a reasonable and sufficient number of teachers and managers who possess new capacities, including creative skills and a commitment to lifelong learning and career development. The role of creativity is emphasized in the report by the World Economic Forum and numerous studies as a crucial competency that determines the success of individuals and organizations in the era of the 4th industrial revolution (Ministry of Education & Training of Vietnam, 2018).

The 2018 general education curriculum emphasizes school autonomy in the implementation of the curriculum, providing key teachers with opportunities and the responsibility to be flexible, creative, autonomous, and quality-assurance-oriented to ensure students acquire the required knowledge, skills, qualities, and capacities. To meet these requirements, each teacher, particularly the key teacher, must possess new competencies such as vision, creativity, motivation, and the ability to attract and inspire fellow educators to pursue educational innovation and build a creative learning environment. Given this, it is crucial for key lower secondary teachers to undergo training and develop their professional competencies to effectively participate in innovation efforts and meet the requirements of the 2018 general national curriculum.

4. THE CONTENT OF DEVELOPMENT OF KEY TEACHERS AT LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS
The development of a team of key teachers at lower secondary schools based on the competency approach is a purposeful and well-planned system aimed at achieving training objectives, implementing curriculum content, and fostering the necessary competencies required to meet professional standards (Harris et al., 1995). Applying the competency-based approach to the development of key teachers in lower secondary schools standardizes the system of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for these teachers to fulfill their duties (Fletcher, 1991). This approach enables educational institutions to identify the competencies of each teacher, particularly key teachers, and develop specific strategies to enhance their competencies and optimize their performance.

5. SOLUTIONS TO DEVELOP A TEAM OF KEY TEACHERS AT LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS ACCORDING TO COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH
Raising awareness of teachers and administrators of lower secondary schools about the need for development of key teachers according to the competence-based approach
The objective of this approach is to foster a shared understanding among teachers and administrators of the critical role played by key teachers in lower secondary schools in driving educational innovation and development within the local community, and to emphasize the importance of developing these teachers in the context of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in general education. This approach will enable them to take appropriate actions and prioritize the development of this team (Nguyen, 2006; O'Shea et al., 2000). The first step is to ensure that teachers understand the vital role played by key teachers in lower secondary schools in driving educational innovation and development within the local community. The second step is to raise awareness among teachers about the importance of developing a team of key teachers in lower secondary schools to meet the current needs and demands of the education sector.

Planning for the development of key lower secondary teachers that takes into account the size of the school and the capacity of the teachers
This solution aims to proactively identify and select teachers with professional capacity, and develop training plans to foster, supplement and replace existing key teachers when necessary, to ensure that the key teachers at the lower secondary school level are always sufficient in numbers, well-structured and of high quality. This will

enable them to meet the requirements of general education innovation and ensure that the education system is always in sync with current demands and standards (Nguyen, 2006; Moore, 2000). The planning of key teachers in lower secondary schools is of great significance in concretizing the educational development strategy in the new period. It serves as a basis for developing specific plans and action programs in the education sector, and is essential in ensuring that the education system keeps pace with changing demands and standards. Secondly, it is essential to ensure the scientific and effective development of key teachers in lower secondary schools. Human resource planning forms the foundation for organizing and utilizing key teachers effectively in lower secondary schools. The planning of human resources for key teachers in lower secondary schools is crucial in determining the success or failure of individual teachers as well as the quality of lower secondary education in localities.

Selecting and using key teachers at lower secondary schools
The goal of this solution is to improve the quality of key teachers at lower secondary schools by perfecting the mechanism of selecting, using, and fostering them based on competency standards. The aim is to build a team with good moral qualities, solid political ideology, and capacity to master the government's guidelines, policies, and laws, while having the ability to solve practical problems in local education. This solution also intends to create conditions and motivation for key teachers at lower secondary schools to strive, train, learn, and enhance their dynamism and creativity in their work. The ultimate objective is to contribute to the successful implementation of the fundamental and comprehensive innovation of local general education (Nguyen, 2006; Koehnecke, 2001). The first step is to assist education management agencies in selecting key teachers at lower secondary schools who possess qualities such as enthusiasm, dynamism, creativity, and a willingness to take responsibility, and who can meet the requirements of local general education innovation. Second, it is important to ensure that the selection, use, and development of key teachers at lower secondary schools are done objectively and democratically, in a way that promotes their capabilities and strengths in their work. Third, provide opportunities and support for the team of key teachers at lower secondary schools to enhance their capacity, creativity, and enthusiasm in the pursuit of educational innovation in the localities.

Fostering key teachers at lower secondary schools
The aim of this solution is to provide key teachers at lower secondary schools with necessary knowledge, practical experience, operational skills, as well as to nurture their moral and psychological qualities. This approach helps to develop basic models of key teachers, who can overcome limitations, promote their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses during their work, and ultimately, foster new qualities for their comprehensive development (Nguyen, 2006; Padilla, 2000). The quality of key teachers at lower secondary schools is formed by many factors, most of which are through training and retraining. Therefore, building and developing a team of key teachers at lower secondary schools must prioritize training and retraining to continuously enhance their professional capacity.

Regularly assessing key teachers at lower secondary schools according to competence-based approach
This solution aims to establish a set of evaluation standards for key teachers at lower secondary schools that accurately reflect their essential qualities and competencies, aligned with the demands of general education innovation. The set of evaluation standards for key teachers at lower secondary schools, reflecting their qualities and competencies, is the goal of this solution. It will serve as the basis for planning, training, fostering, and evaluating at all levels of management. It will also enable the team of key teachers at lower secondary schools to self-assess and strive to meet the new requirements of fundamental and comprehensive education and training innovation (Beall, 1999; Ganser, 2000; Nguyen, 2006). Firstly, this solution aims to meet the requirements of the national strategy in the period of accelerating industrialization and modernization of the country, as well as the fundamental and comprehensive renovation of general education. Secondly, this solution aims to meet the specific roles and labor characteristics of key teachers at lower secondary schools. Third, address the limitations and weaknesses in the quality, management, and leadership of key teachers at lower secondary schools. Fourth, establish a systematic and objective basis for evaluating, classifying, arranging, utilizing, fostering, and providing support for key teachers at lower secondary schools. The assessment serves as a valuable tool for each team of key teachers at lower secondary schools to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, thereby enabling them to strive for self-improvement and meet the demands of general education innovation.

Creating a favorable environment and conditions for the key teachers at lower secondary schools to promote and develop their capacity
The goal of this solution is to motivate and inspire the team of key teachers at lower secondary schools through appropriate material and non-material incentives, taking into account the economic development of each locality. This will encourage them to work productively, efficiently and with high quality, promoting their

talents and capabilities in the context of general education innovation (Payne & Wolfson, 2000). Firstly, this solution aims to ensure that key teachers at lower secondary schools have a stable and improved standard of living, including both material and spiritual aspects. Second, it provides a foundation for positive motivation, unlocking the hidden potential of each key teacher at lower secondary schools, and helping them feel excited and enthusiastic about their work, leading to higher productivity, quality, and efficiency. Thirdly, it is important to implement policies that effectively motivate the development of key teachers at lower secondary schools. This will demonstrate the responsibility and interest of both education and local leaders in supporting the professional growth and well-being of these teachers. Fourthly, it is essential for key teachers at lower secondary schools to be aware of their role in the development of local general education, and to take responsibility for their own professional development and improvement.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The professional development of teachers is an on-going process that starts with initial preparation and continues throughout their career until they retire (Wilson et al., 2001). This new approach to teacher education and development requires a transformation of processes and policies that support teachers in their education, work, and professional development. The professional development of teachers has a significant impact on the success of education reform and student learning. The more opportunities for teachers to be both subjects and objects of educational innovation, the more effective the reform and work of teachers.

The development of key teachers must be systematically planned, supported, funded and studied to ensure the effectiveness of this process (Soler et al., 2001). Teachers must be encouraged to participate in programs designed for their development. In addition, teachers must be provided with the time and financial support to become those who design, implement, and actively participate in professional development opportunities. Teachers must be encouraged to design and implement experiences and opportunities that help them grow as teachers and professionals.

The types of professional development programs and activities designed for teachers must align with their professional needs, personal and professional interests, and their current stage of professional development, as well as the stage of the educational system in effect at their place of employment. (Sachs, 2000). To ensure the comprehensive development of teachers from the beginning of their careers, teacher training institutions and related organizations must collaborate (Young, 2001). External agencies have the capability and responsibility to support professional development programs for teachers, not only by providing financial assistance but also by offering targeted activities and programs that meet the unique needs of educators. A wide range of professional development models and techniques must be provided regularly to teachers. It's important to realize that not all aspects of a teacher's professional development can (or should) be addressed in courses. There are many other professional development models that support the development of teachers on a regular basis in the workplace.

Technology and distance education should be used as a means of supporting the professional development of the core teacher (Pianfetti, 2001; Supovitz & Turner, 2000). However, those responsible for planning and organizing these experiences must be aware of the limitations that teachers may have. For instance, some teachers may lack access to computers or may not possess the necessary technology skills to utilize specific software. Similarly, some educators may face challenges in attending courses held in remote areas, or may be unable to take time away from their classroom duties to attend professional development sessions.

The objectives of the teacher development program should be consistent with the objectives of the curriculum (Riggs & Sandlin, 2000). Numerous systemic reforms prioritize high-stakes testing of students while concurrently promoting constructivist teaching methods aimed at fostering the development of skills that are contextually relevant and applicable. There also needs to be agreement between the content of teachers' professional development programmes and their implementation (Resta et al., 2001). In teaching education, 'the medium is the message'. Traditional teaching methods have proven to be less successful in teaching children. Teaching methods such as memorization, lectures, and teacher-centered classes have been found to be less effective when compared to student-centered instruction that emphasizes understanding and encourages students to learn from each other. However, most in-service teacher training programs are taught in a traditional way, which does not require teachers to participate in classes and learn through group discussions and new pedagogical methods.

The development and development of key teachers at lower secondary schools is influenced by many factors. The solutions are focused on promoting strengths, overcoming weaknesses, taking advantage of opportunities and overcoming challenges in the management of lower secondary teachers. The solutions proposed have received widespread support and regarded as crucial for effective education management in the current period. They are highly feasible and can be implemented with reasonable effort. If secondary school principals apply the management solutions that we provide with flexibility and adapt them to the unique circumstances of their schools, the quality of education is likely to improve significantly, meeting the demands of the new educational landscape.

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