Research Article

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATORS – A CASE STUDY AT HO CHI MINH CITY UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Studies of teacher educators as well as their professional development have been focused since the 1990s. It has been challenging for universities of education over the world to establish effective and appropriate professional development policies and activities for lecturers. In order to explore professional development of lecturers at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education (HCMUE), online questionnaires were sent to all lecturers at the university to ask about their working environment, formal and informal professional education. In this paper, we will mainly discuss the formal professional education including types, barriers and effectiveness of professional development of teacher educators at HCMUE. Descriptive statistics have been considered as the main method for data analysis in this study. Seventy one responses from the lecturers were collected, and the results showed that there were various types of formal professional development of the lecturers at the HCMUE; the lecturers had to face with the common barriers such as: lack of time due to workload, lack of funding and lack of suitable opportunities. The findings also revealed that the most valuable professional development activities of the lecturers normally had been ones that they were free to take them as well as paid tuition by themselves for. Furthermore, the research offers some recommendations for the management boards at universities of education in terms of proposing policies related to teacher educators' formal professional development.

Keywords: professional development; teacher educator; formal professional education; University of Education

1. Introduction

Professional development for teacher educators has been considered as one of the significant factors that possibly impact the quality of the teacher education programs in universities of education. HCMUE is a leading education university in the South of Vietnam. In the period from 2017 to 2021, HCMUE has been selected as one of eight

universities of education to undertake the Enhancing Teacher Education Program in order to enhance the quality of teachers and managerial staff of general education institutions through the development of professionalism based on practical needs, the requirements of the fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). Therefore, exploring the current professional development of lecturers and using it to create suitable professional development policies and activities for the lecturers have been considered as a crucial issue for the HCMUE. In this paper, we will examine types, barriers and effectiveness of professional development of the lecturers and then propose some solutions for enhancing the effectiveness of professional development policies at HCMUE.

2.   *Professional development of lectures*

Professional development of lecturers is a term referring to *"teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth"* (Avalos, 2010, p.10). Based on this definition, professional teacher development impacts directly the development of students as well as involved the ways that lecturers work with students.

Types of education had a long research history, and they were basically divided into three types which are formal, non-formal and informal, as proposed by Coombs and Ahmed (1974). The popular form of education, which was heavily researched and systematically organized, is formal. Meanwhile, from the twentieth century, less formal and flexible forms such as non-formal education and informal education were increasingly interested in because of their ability to maximize learners' activeness. Distinguishing these three education forms, Coombs and his colleagues (1974) also emphasized the role of non-formal form. Therefore, non-formal and informal forms of education were proved to be advanced in adult education. This was also applied for lecturers, who needed to be further trained in order to improve teaching in higher education. The application of non-formal and informal forms of education also noted the requirements of expanding the training focus from knowledge to skills, beliefs and disposition - which were emphasized by ancient educators such as Sakyamuni, Jesus and especially Confucius. In the West, Socrate in the pedagogical oath also emphasized the teacher's two tools: ability and mental strength. However, the division of forms was only theoretical, in fact, the nature of coordination between these forms was quite common. Therefore, Dib (1988) thought these three forms as a process of developing in the direction of expanding learners' freedom and having rich relationships with each other.

One of the biggest barriers to teacher professional development is the lack of training, counselling, or, if any, existing programs do not meet their needs while the lecturers need to improve expertise in the context of development of science and technology. Ahmed (1974) points out issues such as a prolonged training program, which

have caused teachers to miss formal work; or part-time courses, which have always been held during office hours, have prevented lecturers from participating. Galaczi and his colleagues (2018) argued that because teachers were trained in a 20-year-ago model, it was not easy for them to meet the needs of their 21st century students. The authors also criticised that training programs which were not diversified in frameworks. This affected the quality of training. Universities had only provided what they could offer, not what the students wanted to study. These classes often have a passive view of teachers focusing primarily on theoretical knowledge instead of problem-solving, which has been practical and applied experimentally. Holmqvist (2019) raised a warning about the lack of quality teachers and some issues related to this as the job satisfaction was very low because teachers were never consulted experimentally, or there was a problem for teachers because of the difference between theory and practice of teacher development.

The shortage of equipment and facilities was regarded as another obstacle for the professional development of lecturers. Ahmed (1974) analyzed the shortage of funds for reinvestment of facilities; expensive equipment did not receive funding for maintenance and replacement. Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall (2009) also mention difficulties relating to facilities and laboratories.

Effective professional development was considered as a structured professional learning which could lead to changes for teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

3.   Methodology

The surveys were sent by emails to lecturers at HCMUE from February 2019 to April 2019. There were 71 respondents from teacher educators at HCMUE at first, and after screening 69 were kept for analysis. The data were then coded and imported to the SPSS to analyze. Also, in some questions that the lecturers could choose more than one answer, Excel was used to count the answers. In general, descriptive statistics were the main ways to describe and analyze the data..

The survey had five main parts as: contextual questions; formal professional education - general questions; formal teacher development/education - specific questions; questions about informal teacher development and education; and open questions. This paper mainly discusses formal professional education in which focusing on types, barriers and effectiveness of professional teacher development of teacher educators at the HCMUE.

Table 1. *Participants' demographic information*

Demographic variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	28	40.6
	Female	41	59.4
Seniority	0 to 4 years	18	26.1
	5 to 10 years	19	27.5
	11 to 15 years	15	21.7
	> 15 years	17	24.6
Qualification	Bachelor's degree	3	4.3
	Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma	0	0
	Master's degree	45	65.2
	Doctorate	21	30.4
Main teaching subject areas	Maths	1	1.4
	Sciences (including natural sciences, life sciences)	7	10.1
	Languages	13	18.8
	Humanities (including history and geography)	16	23.2
	Arts	2	2.9
	Technology (including IT and computing)	1	1.4
	Physical Education and Sports	1	1.4
	Social Sciences (including psychology and sociology)	13	18.8
	Education	15	21.7
	Total	**69**	**100.0**

Table 1 shows demographic information of the surveyed lecturers at HCMUE: gender, seniority, qualification and main teaching areas.

Of the 69 participants, the percentage of female was greater than that of male. The number of lecturers with working experience from 0 to 4 years, from 5 to 10 years, from 11 to 15 years and over 15 years working in higher education were relatively equal, respectively 26.1%, 27.5%, 21.7% and 24.6%. In terms of qualification, the percentage of lecturers with master's degree was 65.2%, which was more than two times higher than that of lecturers with doctorate's degree. The number of lecturers with bachelor's degree accounted for the lowest proportion with 4.3%.

Lecturers from four teaching areas: Humanities (including History and Geography), Education, Languages and Social Science (including Psychology and Sociology) accounted for nearly 82.5% of lecturers.

4. Findings

4.1. *Main types of formal professional education of teacher educators at the HCMUE*

Over 82.6% of the lecturers undertook formal professional education that support their development as a teacher educator (as training, courses, continuous professional development or in-service training) in the last 12 months. There was only 15.9% of lecturers who did not participate in any activities of formal professional development.

Table 2. Main types of formal teacher development of lecturers at HCMUE

Valid	Frequencies	Percentage
Didactic training	47	68.1%
Conferences	32	46.4%
Workshops	55	79.7%
Learning on the job	45	65.2%
Collaborative learning	22	31.9%
International links	16	23.2%
Distance learning	2	2.9%
Peer observation	35	50.7%
Self-directed study	54	78.3%
Research projects related to teaching and learning	42	60.9%
Other	2	2.9%

According to Table 2, workshops, self-directed study, didactic training and research projects related to teaching and learning were the most popular forms of formal teacher development of the lecturers at HCMUE.

4.2. *Barriers to professional development of lecturers*

Table 3. Main barriers to teacher professional development

Valid	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Lack of time due to workload	59	85.5%	1
Lack of funding	43	62.3%	2
Lack of information about the best way to develop as a teacher	22	31.9%	4
Lack of support from managers/employers	21	30.4%	5
Lack of suitable opportunities	28	40.6%	3
My other commitments don't allow the time	12	17.4%	6
None	4	5.8%	7

The lack of time due to high workload was the barrier with the highest rate of 85.5%. Over half of the lecturers (62.3%) mentioned that the lack of funding was also considered as a difficulty for them to develop their professional development. The lack of suitable opportunities was the third constraint that can impact the professional development of the lecturers with the vote of 40.6%. The lack of information about the best ways to develop as a teacher and the lack of support from the employer were also barriers for the professional development of the lecturers according to the opinions of about one-third of lecturers. There was nearly one-fifth of the lecturers also agreeing that their commitments on other activities did not allow them to spend time on the professional development, while 5.8% accepted that they did not have any barrier for their professional development.

4.3. *Effectiveness of professional development activities by the lecturers at HCMUE*

The result in the final open question of the most valuable professional development activities showed that short courses taught by the lecturers who graduated from foreign countries with updated knowledge, conferences and workshop, Master and PhD degree programs and working in projects are the most valuable activities for the teacher educators at HCMUE. There were 40.6% of lecturers stating that they were funded by their employer for their professional learning activities while about a third of the lecturers who answered that they paid for these activities. However, 15.9% of the lecturers mentioned that both their employer and themselves paid for their most valuable professional development activities.

Table 4. *Subjects paying for the most valuable PD activities of lecturers and subjects deciding for the participation in these*

Subjects paying for the most valuable PD activities of lecturers			**Subjects deciding for the participation in the most valuable PD activities of lecturers**	
	Frequencies	**Percentage**	**Frequencies**	**Percentage**
Self	22	31.9%	33	47.8%
Employers	28	40.6%	30	43.5%
Both of lecturers and employers	11	15.9%	0	0
Other	8	11.6%	6	8.7%
Total	**69**	**100%**	**69**	**100%**

There was not much difference between the survey result that lecturers' most significant professional development activities decided by themselves and those decided by their employers, 47.8% and 43.5% respectively (Table 5). These numbers showed that both lecturers and employers play a crucial role in deciding the participation in the most valuable professional development activities for the teacher educators.

Table 5. *Funding and deciding for the participation in the least PD activities*

	Subjects paying for the least valuable PD activities of lecturers		Subjects deciding for the participation in the least valuable PD activities of lecturers	
	Frequencies	**Percentage**	**Frequencies**	**Percentage**
Self	9	13.0%	10	15.9%
Employers	48	69.6%	34	54.0%
Both of lecturers and employers	3	4.3%	16	25.4%
Other	9	13.0%	9	13.0%
Total	**69**	**100%**	**69**	**100%**

A considerable number (69.6%) of the lecturers stated that their least valuable professional development activities funded by their employers whereas only 13% of these answers were for the activities paid by themselves or by others.

While 54% of the lecturers reported that these activities were decided by their employers, 15.9% were decided by themselves.

These numbers mean that most of the least valuable professional development activities of the lecturers were funded and decided by the employers, and these activities may be not appropriate for the lecturers' needs for professional development.

Therefore, it could be concluded that the most significant professional development activities were the ones that they had more power in deciding. While the least valuable professional development activities were the ones primarily funded by their employers and compulsory.

Table 6. *Reasons leading to the most valuable professional development (PD) activities of lecturers*

Valid	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
It impacted on the way I understand my role as a teacher	53	76.8%	1
It updated my teaching skills or competencies	53	76.8%	1
It impacted on the way I work with my students	50	72.5%	2
It impacted on my subject specialist knowledge	46	66.7%	3
It informed me about new research or ideas for teaching	4	63.8%	4
It enabled me to collaborate with others	43	62.3%	5
It updated me on policy changes	25	36.2%	6
It made me aware of new initiatives	40	58.0%	6
Other	1	1.4%	7

Table 7. Reasons leading to the least valuable PD activities of lecturers

Valid	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
It did not update my teaching skills or competencies	30	43.5%	1
It did not impact on the way I work with my students	25	36.2%	2
It did not inform me about new research or ideas for teaching	20	29.0%	3
It did not impact on my subject specialist knowledge	18	26.1%	4
It did not impact on the way I understand my role as a teacher	17	24.6%	5
It did not update me on policy changes	15	21.7%	6
It did not enable me to collaborate with others	15	21.7%	6
It did not make me aware of new initiatives	15	21.7%	6
Other	13	18.8%	7

Lecturers ranked PD activities based on the necessity of the activities in helping them update their teaching skills or competencies and impacting their ways to work with students at two highest levels in both questions of the reasons leading to the most and the least valuable PD activities of lecturers (Table 6 and Table 7).

5. Discussion

For the barriers in developing their professional, the lack of time due to the workload is the most concern of over 80% of lecturers. This result is consistent with the previous studies of Ahmed (1974). In fact, according to the Regulation No.2652/QĐ-ĐHSP on a working regime for lecturers issued by HCMUE in October 30th, 2017, the total working time of lecturers in a school year to perform tasks of teaching, scientific research, training and other tasks in is 1,760 hours (HCMUE, 2017). Basically, this regulation is built based on the Circular No. 47/2014/TT-BGDĐT on a working regime for lecturers of the Ministry of Education issued on December 31st, 2014 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014). Hence, the concern of the lack of time due to the workload for professional development of lecturers may be a common issue of other lecturers in other universities in Vietnam, not only at HCMUE. Besides the lack of time due to the workload, the finding also indicated that the lack of information about the best ways to develop as a teacher and the lack of suitable opportunities were also obstacles for many lecturers.

For the most valuable professional development activities, the study revealed that the most significant professional development activities of the lecturers normally were ones that they paid for and were selected by the lecturers. The lecturers ranked professional development activities related to how the activities helped them to update their teaching skills or competencies and impacting the ways they work with students at two highest levels in both questions of the reasons that they thought those particular activities were

valuable and those were lacking in value. This means that professional development activities that are significant for the lecturers are the ones that can impact much on their updating their teaching skills and competencies as well as enhancing their ability to work with their students. In fact, the ability to work with students does not only depend on the knowledge or theory of lecturers, but also on their ability to apply these into practices. Therefore, it can be easily explained that professional development activities that can foster both the knowledge/theory and the practice of the lecturers definitely will be valuable for the lecturers. In another word, effective professional development activities are the ones can result in changes for the lecturers' knowledge and practices (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

At HCMUE, the strategy of developing sources, training and retraining for teacher educators in the period of 2015-2020, vision to 2030 set objectives that the university will have over 35% of lecturers with PhD or higher degree; 10% of them have titles of professors and associate professors; 100% of them will reach IT and foreign language standards; 10% of non-English-speaking lecturers can teach in English; 1/3 of lecturers will receive the doctorate degree abroad, striving to 2030, the proportion of lecturers with doctorate degrees will be over 45% (HCMUE, 2016). The university also builds a policy on training and developing lecturers, funding and supporting policies for lecturers in participating in training courses; workshop and conferences; and postgraduate education programs in order to support the lecturers in their professional development. Building policies for professional development of lecturers are still mainly based on regulations of the Government and the Ministry of Education and Training, but have not focused much on needs of the lecturers and the evaluation of the effectiveness of these activities. Thus, it is necessary to create suitable professional development policies and valuable activities in order to enhance these at the HCMUE.

6.   Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper was to explore the situation of professional development of the lecturers at the HCMUE, particularly in the forms of formal professional development, the obstacles and the effectiveness of the professional development of these lecturers.

The result showed that most of the lecturers participate in a variety of forms of formal professional education in the last 12 months. The lack of time due to the workload, lack of funding and lack of suitable opportunities were identified as three common obstacles for the professional development by many lecturers. They also appreciated the professional development activities that they have autonomy in funding and deciding to take. Also, the lecturers gave positive feedback on professional development activities that help them to update their teaching skills or competencies and impacting on the way they work with students.

This research only described and analyzed the overview of types of formal professional development, barriers and the effectiveness of this for the lecturers at the HCMUE. The study did not examine the reasons of these findings, cultural and context issues affecting the findings. Therefore, the next research should interview lecturers and managers at the university in order to investigate more reasons of using their popular formal professional development types, their reasons of obstacles and the effectiveness of their formal professional development activities at the HCMUE.

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BỒI DƯỠNG CHUYÊN MÔN CHO GIẢNG VIÊN SƯ PHẠM – NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM THÀNH PHỐ HỒ CHÍ MINH

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TÓM TẮT

Các nghiên cứu về giảng viên sư phạm và việc phát triển chuyên môn cho đội ngũ bắt đầu được chú ý từ thập niên 90, hiện tại cũng là thách thức đối với các trường đại học đào tạo giáo viên trên khắp thế giới trong việc xây dựng các chính sách và hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn phù hợp và hiệu quả cho giảng viên. Để tìm hiểu về việc phát triển chuyên môn cho giảng viên tại Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, các bảng hỏi trực tuyến đã được gửi đến tất cả các giảng viên tại trường để hỏi về môi trường làm việc và việc học tập chuyên môn chính thức và không chính thức. Trong nghiên cứu này, chúng tôi sẽ tập trung thảo luận việc học tập chuyên môn chính thức bao gồm các hình thức học tập, các rào cản và hiệu quả của các hoạt động này của giảng viên sư phạm. Thống kê mô tả được xem như công cụ chính cho các phân tích dữ liệu trong nghiên cứu này. 71 phiếu phản hồi từ giảng viên và kết quả thu được cho thấy có nhiều hình thức học tập chuyên môn của giảng viên tại Trường; giảng viên phải đối mặt với các rào cản phổ biến như: thiếu thời gian do khối lượng công việc nhiều, thiếu nguồn tài trợ và thiếu các cơ hội phù hợp. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng thể hiện rằng các hoạt động học tập chuyên môn có giá trị nhất cho giảng viên sư phạm thường là các hoạt động mà họ có thể tự chọn để theo học cũng như tự chi trả học phí. Đồng thời, kết quả nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra một số khuyến nghị cho các cấp quản lí tại các trường đào tạo giáo viên trong việc đề xuất các chính sách liên quan đến việc bồi dưỡng chuyên môn chính thức cho giảng viên sư phạm.

Từ khóa: *bồi dưỡng chuyên môn; giảng viên sư phạm; học tập chuyên môn chính thức; trường đại học đào tạo giáo viên*