



Research Article

STRUCTURE OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY FOR TEACHERS TEACHING STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Visual impairments affect the learning modalities of visually-impaired students. Accordingly, the teacher who teaches elementary visually-impaired students must have special professional competencies as well as specialized skills for these students. The paper presents the structure of professional competencies of teachers teaching these students in primary schools. Accordingly, the paper recommends the structure of professional competence of teachers teaching visually impaired students including 9 standards with two quality standards and seven competency standards.

Keywords: professional competency, professional competency of teachers teaching elementary visually-impaired students; elementary visually-impaired students

1. Rationale

According to the modern perspective, competency is the combination of knowledge, skill, attitude, and motivation of a person to successfully perform a particular task. A competent one can demonstrate professional responsibilities and a high level of work effectiveness based on required standards of a specific job (Mulder, 2014). Hence, each and every occupation requires different competencies.

Teaching is a career of numerous jobs in any society. In Vietnam, a teacher is highly respected because the Vietnamese tradition is “venerating teachers and respecting morals,” and teachers cherish and develop personalities and physical strength of humans. Vietnamese Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, has stated that “teaching is one of a most noble professions in a variety of noble professions.” Therefore, in accordance with knowledge and teaching skills, morals play an important role in terms of teaching. In Vietnamese educational system, there are four main levels of education: kindergarten, primary, secondary and high education. Primary teacher standards were promulgated in

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2007, and secondary and high school teachers standards were created in 2009. These Occupational Standards have been used for annual assessment (The Ministry of Education and Training, 2007, 2008, 2009). Most recently, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Common Professional Standards of teachers at all levels in 2018, and they have been effective since the school year of 2018-2019.

Currently, teachers teaching visually-impaired students in primary schools have been evaluated by these Standards. However, some managers believed that this assessment is not appropriate for teachers who have been working in the special education. It is commonly believed that the current Standards for general teachers did not reflect the competencies of teachers teaching visually-impaired students. Moreover, it is suggested that a different assessment tool and Standards should be developed as soon as possible for these teachers.

Analysis of the Standards demonstrated that these standards were established based on core competencies and characteristics of normal teaching at the different levels of education. Thus, to develop an assessment tool and Occupational Standards for teachers teaching primary visually-impaired students, it is essential to identify different core competencies of these teachers. This leads to a necessity of studying what different core competencies are for teachers teaching these students and different standards will be then developed for them.

Teachers teaching visually-impaired students in primary schools should have not only general teaching competencies but also specialized competencies because visually-impaired students in primary schools have special needs and characteristics. The modification of educational curriculum for these primary students are also reasons to define different core competencies of these primary teachers.

2. What make teachers of visually-impaired different to general teachers

Altering the Curriculum for Teaching Visually Impaired Students

The study of Gougoux, Zatozze, Lassonde, Voss and Lepore (2005), Pascual-Leone, Amedi, Fregni and Merabet (2005), Rauschecker (1995) and Roder and Neville (2003) emphasized that over-dependence on vision to achieve and construct symbols and shapes can rise the opposite effect to prevent the processing of surrounding information from the remaining senses. In contrast, later evidence shows that the blind (as opposed to the sighted in the test) exhibited superior skills in tasks related to hearing and tactile.

According to Amedi, Lotfi, Merabet, Bermpohl and Pascual-Leone (2005), the occipital lobe, referred to as the visual processing center, can change from the function of processing visual information to the function of analyzing information of other senses. These researchers considered the occipital lobe as Central Processing Unit to process visual information. Hence, the occipital lobe is the "Processing center" of activities based on useful information. When vision is normal, visual information is sufficient for the

occipital lobe to process which brings to prevent or overlap information from other senses. When visual information is insufficient, the occipital lobe can utilize non-visual information to process (Pascual-Leone and Hamilton, 2001; Amedi, et al., 2005).

Based on these research findings, it can be confirmed that people who are totally blind are capable of developing as sighted people due to the adaptation rules of the brain and the senses. Accordingly, the tactile, in particular the hands of the blind when used frequently, can replace the eyes and be their main learning tool. As a result, the curriculum for visually impaired should be modified to be suitable for primarily studying through the sensation of touch.

Modifying the Curriculum to Teach Primary School Visually Impaired Students

As the mode of studying is replacing vision with touch, the curriculum for visually impaired students should be modified to give them sufficient opportunities to develop like the sighted students through activities which call for the use of touch.

According to Hatlen (1996, 2003), curriculum for the visually impaired students must include not only the common core curriculum but also the expanded core curriculum including nine areas: (1)- Assistive Technology/Technology, (2)- Career Education, (3)- Compensatory or Access skills, (4)- Independent Living, (5)- Orientation and Mobility, (6)- Recreation & Leisure, (7)- Sensory Efficiency (auditory, tactual & visual), (8)- Self-Determination, and (9)- Social Interaction. This expanded curriculum ensures children with visual impairment be able to learn without or less based visual modality and be developed as much as possible regardless of disabilities.

In Vietnam, some special schools for visually-impaired students, including Nguyen Dinh Chieu School for the Blind at Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang City, have been utilizing parallel curriculum for visually-impaired students. Therefore, besides Core Curriculum, Compensatory Core Curriculum including Orientation and Mobility, Independent Skills, Vocational Training, and Effectively utilizing vision have been included in their educational programs.

Despite the difference in calling the name of expanded core curriculum and compensatory curriculum in the United States and Vietnam, it is easy to find out similarities between them. They are similar in instructing students to have Braille literacy, Soroban skills, Orientation and Mobility, and Independent Skills. However, it is important to know whether teachers teaching visually-impaired students have sufficient skills to teach these curricula. The answer to this concern is that teachers need to have knowledge of these specialized skills because these are truly essential to successfully teach children with visual impairment. The solution for teachers of students with visual impairment in the United States is clear under the Professional Ethics and Standards which issued and updated by CEC in the book "What Every Special Educator Must Know" (CEC, 2015). However, in Vietnam it is still unclear due to lacking professional standards for teachers of

visually-impaired students. Therefore, developing professional standards for those teachers in Vietnam is a need and knowing the core competencies of those teachers are very important to develop the appropriate professional standards.

3. Core Competencies for Teachers of Primary School Visually-Impaired Students

The first recorded attempts to identify competencies needed by teachers of the visually impaired was done in the 1970s. There have been many research studies conducted about core competencies needed by teachers of visually impaired students. Ross (2012) states that the roles of these teachers in the United State have been mentioned since the 1970s in publications. One example is “The Massachusetts Role Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments.” This material was the outcome of previous research and observations by experts in visual impairment in the U.S.A. In the document called “The Role of Teachers/Consultants about Visual Impairment” by Ross (1994), the author stated that the undergraduate curriculum should consider the role of teachers as well as compensatory skills including Braille literacy and working ability, educational levels in various educational settings, family involvement, and interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration (as cited by Ross, 2012).

Spungin (1977) reported the American Foundation for the Blind’s study of the competency based curricular for teachers of the visually impaired. The curriculum includes twelve areas that should be used to develop professional qualifications for these teachers. By applying this curriculum, the role of teachers teaching visually impaired students has been researched, extended, and adapted to meet the needs of students. Although the role of these teachers may change over time, the basic role is maintained and divided into two main types: direct services and indirect services. The former contains an assessment of students and teaching strategies. The latter includes family involvement, interdisciplinary and interagency Collaboration, and administrative work such as writing reports, preparing teaching aids (Spungin, 1977).

Spungin and Ferrell (2007) have continued researching the competencies needed by teachers of visually-impaired students, and they have suggested seven groups of competencies for these teachers including: (1) Assessment and Evaluation; (2) Educational and Instructional Strategies-Learning Environment; (3) Educational and Instructional Strategies-Accessing the General Curriculum; (4) Educational and Instructional Strategies-Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum; (5) Guidance and Counseling; (6) Administration and Supervision, and (7) School Community Relations.

Researchers have suggested knowledge and skills teachers teaching visually-impaired students needed. Erin, Holbrook, Sanspre, and Swallow (2006), recommended in-depth knowledge and skills for these teachers including:

- Braille, including Braille in math;
- Physiology of the eye and impacts of eye diseases/ eye problems;

- Teaching strategies to train Communication Skills, including Literacy tools (Braille, large print), Read-Aloud Books, Braille typewriters, slate, stylus, tactile graphs, textbooks, and other tactile materials;
- Visual Function Assessment;
- Knowledge of impacts of other disabilities on development;
- Adapting environment and devices to enhance visual acuity;
- Collaborative skills and counseling;
- Knowledge of the transition process through different stages including kindergarten and vocational education;
- Teaching through self-help skills involved in daily activities, recreational activities and social skills;
- Knowledge of agencies and services to support visually impaired people;
- Basics skills in Orientation and Mobility containing definitions, methods of walking with sighted people and techniques for safety;
- Philosophical issues and skills in self-advocacy;
- The development of visually impaired children and experiences of these children;
- Assessment in general, and assessment of visually impaired students specifically;
- Assessment and teaching nine areas in the Expanded Core Curriculum:
 - o Skills in academic compensation, communication and literacy
 - o Self-help skills
 - o Technical support
 - o Orientation and mobility
 - o Social skills
 - o Self-regulation
 - o Effectively utilizing vision
 - o Skills in recreation and leisure.

Moreover, roles and responsibilities of teachers are affected by the change in curricula, teachers, standards, increased numbers of children with Multiple Disabilities and

Visual Impairment (MDVI), changes of educational technologies, and an organizing of the learning process. According to Silberman and Sacks (2007), students with MDVI have the right to be educated by professional teachers. Thus, roles and competencies of teachers should be modified to meet needs of these students. These teachers need to have high ability to teach Visually Impaired students with other disabilities such as physical disability, intellectual disability, mental disorders, and problem behaviors.

Therefore, the seven groups of competencies suggested by Spungin and Ferrell (2007) have to be revised. In the first two groups, teachers are required to know how to assess students and explain outcomes of the Functional Vision Assessment and the Developmental Assessment in Visually Impaired students with other disabilities. These requirements are similar in the remaining groups including Orientation and Mobility, Social Interaction, Self-help Skills, Skills in Recreation and Leisure, Human Sexuality, Skills in Transition and Self-regulation. Additionally, Visually Impaired students can focus on academic functions in the common curriculum while students with MDVI need a special curriculum which requires specialized competencies for these teachers. These competencies are:

- Teaching students with MDVI how to use complementary and alternative communicational systems;
- Managing and supporting positive behaviors of children with MDVI through strategies of Positive Behavior Support;
- Combining the common curriculum with the special curriculum of students with MDVI;
- Developing and enacting transition programs for students with MDVI.

Furthermore, teachers are required to have skills in interdisciplinary collaboration with experts and parents to satisfy the diverse and unique requirements of students with MDVI because these students have multiple needs as a result of various disabilities. Teachers must understand roles and functions of different experts such as physiotherapists, speech pathologies, vocational experts, and to advocate for students with MDVI as well as their families.

In conclusion, studying through the sensation of touch requires adaptations to the educational curriculum for learners with visual impairments. That requires teachers of learners with visual impairment must many other specific professional competencies such as: 1) Assessment and Evaluation; (2) Educational and Instructional Strategies-Learning Environment; (3) Educational and Instructional Strategies-Accessing the General Curriculum; (4) Educational and Instructional Strategies-Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum; (5) Guidance and Counseling; (6) Administration and Supervision, and (7)

School Community Relations. Additionally, increasing numbers of children with MDVI require teachers to expand their competencies, thereby becoming more and more specialized. These seven standards are applied for teachers teaching students with visual impairment including other disabilities.

4. Structure of professional competencies for teachers teaching the visually-impaired students in primary schools

Students with visual impairments are learners with visual impairment, the type of disability that makes their learning based primarily on haptic images rather than vision. For visually-impaired students especially students who are totally blind, touch becomes their "eyes." Tactile, when used appropriately, can help children to perceive the world around them as quality as vision. As a result, visually-impaired students can develop to their full potential just like sighted students of the same age. In order to help visually-impaired students have the full opportunities to develop, educators must understand the differences in their learning styles and have specific teaching skills for visually-impaired students. The seven competency groups proposed by Spungin and Ferrell (2007) have included the specific professional competencies of teachers teaching visually-impaired students.

However, similar to sighted students, each age group has its own psychological and physiological characteristics that affect the learning characteristics of students. Therefore, the education systems are divided into levels to design appropriate educational curricula. Elementary students have specific psychological characteristics such as thinking that are still more intuitive, specific, dominated by emotional factors, paying attention to external signs and details instead of internal signs and nature of objects. Accordingly, the teachers teaching primary visually-impaired students need both the professional competencies of primary teachers and the professional competencies of teachers who teach the visually-impaired learners.

Basing on the Occupational Standards of primary teachers (Decision No. 14/2007 / QĐ-BGDĐT) and the seven competencies to teach visually impaired students (Spungin & Ferrell, 2007) as well as the goals of primary education in Vietnam, it is possible to draw the structure of main professional competencies of teachers teaching students with visually impairment in primary schools as follows:

(1) - Political qualities and civic responsibilities, including the ability to understand and implement the guidelines and policies of the Party and the State; the rules and regulations in the education area in general and the educational units where teacher is working in particular; demonstrating the responsibility of citizens in society and the community.

(2) - Ethical qualities and professional values, including the ability to understand and demonstrate morality of citizens in general and of teachers in particular. This capacity requires teachers to love their career, clearly be aware of their career values and respects

for their career values, thereby loving their students and having strong beliefs in their careers, so that they can maintain professional development motivation.

(3) Foundation competencies, including the ability to understand and master the content of curriculum in elementary schools; ability to systematize knowledge of the subjects in the program; understand the physiological characteristics of elementary school students and the effects of visual impairment on the development and learning styles of elementary school visually-impaired students.

(4) The competencies to evaluate elementary visually-impaired students, including the ability to understand and conduct the developmental assessment of elementary visually-impaired students along with other specific assessments such as vision functional assessment; ability to write assessment report and apply assessment results to develop and modify educational plans and teaching methods to meet the capacity and needs of each student and group of elementary school students with visual impairment.

(5) The competencies of education and teaching planning, including the capacity to develop and adjust the short-term and long-term education and teaching plans for the whole class as well as each individual student. This competency also includes the ability to modify lesson plans based on the general education and teaching plans of the whole class as well as the individual educational plans of each student.

(6) The competency to organize educational activities, including the ability to implement educational and teaching plans for the whole class as well as individual educational plans of each student. This capacity requires teacher to know how to determine educational methods and activities in accordance with the identified educational objectives; know how to apply educational measures to support positive behavior of visually-impaired students; know how to implement individual education plan inside and outside classroom.

(7) The competency to organize teaching activities, including the ability to select and properly apply teaching methods towards promoting the dominant senses as well as all the remaining senses of visually-impaired students; know how to create a cooperative, friendly and suitable learning environment for elementary visually-impaired students; use and design special equipment and teaching aids for visually-impaired students as well as know how to apply technology and specialized teaching software for elementary visually-impaired students.

(8) The competency to collaborate with others in educating students. This capacity requires teachers to know how to establish and effectively use the network of resources collaboratively in the process of educating the elementary visually-impaired students to ensuring this process being effectively. This competency also includes the skills of counseling and collaboration with parents of elementary visually-impaired students.

(9) The competency to support inclusive education for elementary visually-impaired students. This capacity requires a full understanding of inclusive education; skills to build,

adjust, and organize inclusive education supporting plans for elementary visually-impaired students as well as providing of counseling and guidance skills for inclusive school teachers.

These nine standards will shape the structure of professional competencies of primary school teachers who teach students with visual impairment. These standards are proposed based on the essential qualities and competencies of primary teachers and teachers who teach learners with visual impairment. The standards can be a basis for educational managers to design tools to assess the professional competencies of primary teachers as well as institutions training teachers of visually-impaired students can refer to them in designing teacher training and retraining programs.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

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CẤU TRÚC NĂNG LỰC CHUYÊN MÔN CỦA GIÁO VIÊN DẠY HỌC SINH KHIẾM THỊ TIỂU HỌC TẠI VIỆT NAM

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TÓM TẮT

Khuyết tật thị giác ảnh hưởng đến phương thức học tập của học sinh khiếm thị. Theo đó, người giáo viên dạy học sinh khiếm thị tiểu học vừa phải có năng lực chuyên môn của người giáo viên tiểu học vừa phải có những năng lực chuyên môn chuyên biệt dành cho học sinh khiếm thị. Bài báo trình bày những cơ sở khoa học nhằm đề xuất cấu trúc năng lực chuyên môn của người giáo viên dạy học sinh khiếm thị tiểu học. Theo đó, đề xuất cấu trúc năng lực chuyên môn giáo viên dạy học sinh khiếm thị gồm 9 tiêu chuẩn, trong đó có 2 tiêu chuẩn về phẩm chất và 7 tiêu chuẩn về năng lực.

Từ khóa: năng lực chuyên môn; năng lực chuyên môn giáo viên dạy học sinh khiếm thị tiểu học; học sinh khiếm thị tiểu học