

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

**YOUNG ENGLISH LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS
AND PRACTICES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
ACTIVITIES AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN HANOI****HOANG NGOC TUE* - NGUYEN THI MINH HANH** -****LE DUC HANH*** - VU THI NHUNG**** - VU THI LICH*******

ABSTRACT: Teachers play a central role in classroom instruction, yet at the start of their careers, they often encounter significant challenges in enhancing their instructional strategies to achieve high teaching effectiveness. Professional development (PD) activities are an effective means of supporting teachers, especially novices, in developing the skills necessary for high-quality teaching. This study aims to explore the perspectives of young English teachers on PD at the tertiary level and the factors influencing their decision to participate in PD activities. Employing a qualitative approach, the study involves interviews with 11 novice English lecturers at a university in Hanoi, Vietnam. The findings reveal that while the lecturers have a positive perception of PD, several factors hinder their participation in these activities. The study offers valuable insights into their preferences for PD and the barriers they encounter, suggesting that educational planners should provide targeted support and design appropriate PD programs to assist novice lecturers in the early stages of their teaching career.

KEY WORDS: Professional development, young lecturers, perception, English.

RECEIVED: February, 27th, 2025.

EDITED: June, 19th, 2025

1. Introduction

In the context of educational reform and the increasing demand for quality teaching, professional development (PD) plays a pivotal role in shaping teachers' effectiveness. PD offers teachers opportunities to explore new roles, develop innovative instructional techniques, refine their practices, and grow both professionally and personally (Ozkan, 2015). For novice English teachers, particularly those beginning their careers at the university level, PD provides crucial opportunities to navigate the complexities of teaching in an academic environment while enhancing their instructional methods, leading to improved teaching effectiveness (Hattie, 2012).

In Vietnam, where higher education is undergoing significant reforms to better align with international standards, understanding how novice English lecturers perceive PD programs is essential for supporting their professional growth and ensuring educational quality. Insights into their perspectives can help inform the design of more targeted and effective PD programs that meet the specific needs of novice English lecturers, thereby contributing to their PD and enhancing the quality of English language teaching in Vietnam's higher education system. Although much research has explored the importance of PD for teachers, there is limited focus on the experiences and perceptions of novice English lecturers in Vietnamese universities.

This research aims to explore how PD activities are perceived by young English lecturers, and understand the factors that influence their participation in PD activities. Specifically, this study seeks to answer two key questions: (1) How do novice English lecturers perceive PD activities? (2) What factors influence novice English lecturers' decisions to participate in PD activities?

2. Literature Review**2.1. PD activities for teachers**

PD activities for teachers have garnered significant attention due to their important role in enhancing teaching skills and improving classroom management. PD activities are divided into two main categories: traditional and non-traditional, based on factors such as time and the process of the

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activities. Traditional PD primarily includes short-term workshops and conferences, while non-traditional methods involve activities such as mentoring, coaching, peer observation, and learning from colleagues. Research has shown that while traditional PD allows teachers flexibility in terms of time, it does not lead to significant changes in teaching practices (Birman et al., 2000). In contrast, non-traditional PD, such as peer observation and mentoring, requires more time but tends to be more effective as it provides opportunities for deeper learning and helps novice teachers integrate more effectively into the teaching community (Birman et al., 2000). Therefore, both methods have their own value, aiming to improve teaching skills and benefit students and the education system as a whole.

2.2. Roles of PD activities

Kwakman (2001) emphasized the critical role of PD in improving overall education quality. Birman et al. (2000) supported this view, stating that PD programs equip teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge for success. Borko (2004) also highlighted that PD activities enhance educational quality at institutions. Recent studies have unraveled the complexities surrounding how young educators navigate their professional landscapes, particularly in terms of their perceptions of feasibility and meaningfulness within their roles (Mukundan et al., 2024; Smith & Wyness, 2024).

The significance of PD extends beyond individual teachers to the school context. Demirtas (2010) argued that PD programs bridge gaps and ensure teachers acquire the necessary competencies for effective teaching. Rogers et al. (2007) stressed that PD is essential for both novice and experienced teachers, offering opportunities for continuous professional growth.

PD helps young teachers understand student needs better and address challenges effectively, while encouraging collaboration (Postholm, 2018). Ghani & Ghani (2021) concluded that PD activities help new teachers develop teaching strategies, content knowledge, and classroom management skills, ultimately improving student learning outcomes and the institution's overall status.

In summary, PD is essential for teachers' professional growth and the quality of education. It equips teachers with the skills needed to improve teaching, stay updated in their field, and contribute to school improvement, ultimately shaping the future quality of education.

2.3. Factors influencing teacher participation in PD activities

Kwakman (2003) identifies three groups of factors influencing teachers' participation in PD activities: personal, work-related, and environmental.

2.3.1. Personal Factors

This group consists of five key elements:

- *Professional attitude*: teachers who find these roles meaningful are more likely to actively engage in learning opportunities to improve their skills (Clardy, 2000).

- *Appraisals of feasibility*: teachers' participation is affected by whether they believe they have the resources, time, and energy to engage in PD. Boekaerts (1996) suggests that teachers are more likely to participate if they find the activities feasible, while those feeling overwhelmed are less likely to participate.

- *Appraisals of meaningfulness* of PD activities: Teachers are more likely to engage in activities that they believe will benefit their teaching. Conversely, if the activities do not align with their needs or long-term goals, their participation may decrease.

- *Emotional exhaustion*: when teachers feel burnt out, they may lack the motivation and energy to participate (Schaufeli et al., 1994).

- *Loss of personal achievement*: teachers who feel ineffective in their roles may struggle to see the value in PD activities (Van Horn et al., 1997). Conversely, teachers who maintain a sense of achievement are more likely to seek opportunities for PD.

2.3.2. Task Factors

This group can take five forms:

- *Work pressure* relates to the volume and pace of tasks teachers must complete. If managed well, moderate pressure can improve skills, but excessive pressure may lead to stress, reducing PD participation. (Söderfeldt et al., 1996)

- *Emotional demands* refer to the emotional investment required in teaching, such as managing student needs and classroom situations. High emotional demands can lead to burnout, but when teachers feel emotionally supported, they may be more willing to engage in PD. (Söderfeldt et al., 1996)

- *Job variety* refers to the range of tasks and learning opportunities available. A diverse set of responsibilities can motivate teachers to seek PD to develop new skills and teaching methods. (Söderfeldt et al., 1996)

- *Autonomy* in decision-making and control over teaching methods is another significant factor. Teachers with greater autonomy are more likely to engage in PD, as they feel more in control of their PD (Ganster, 1989).

- *Participation* in decision-making within the workplace, such as in policy formation, enhances teachers' investment in PD (Firestone & Pennell, 1993).

2.3.3. Work Environment Factors

This group includes four aspects:

- *Management support* refers to helpful interactions from management and colleagues. Positive support from school leadership, such as providing resources and time for PD, encourages teachers to participate in PD. Collaborative relationships between teachers also enhance PD participation, as sharing experiences and mentoring each other fosters a supportive learning environment (Glickman et al., 2007).

- *Collegial support* in the institution plays a crucial role in PD participation. Schools that create a culture valuing PD and encouraging participation tend to have higher teacher engagement in development activities (Leithwood et al., 1999).

- *Institutional assessment* including feedback on teaching practices and the effectiveness of PD programs can motivate teachers to participate in those activities when they are viewed as constructive and aligned with their needs (Guskey, 2000).

- *Institutional strategies* such as policies and legal frameworks that support PD are essential. Effective organizational strategies that align with teachers' goals and provide development opportunities can significantly enhance participation in PD activities (Timperley, 2008).

In conclusion, teachers' participation in PD activities is influenced by personal, work-related, and environmental factors, each playing a significant role in fostering a culture of continuous professional growth. Those factors form the theoretical model used in this study which is summarized in the diagram below:

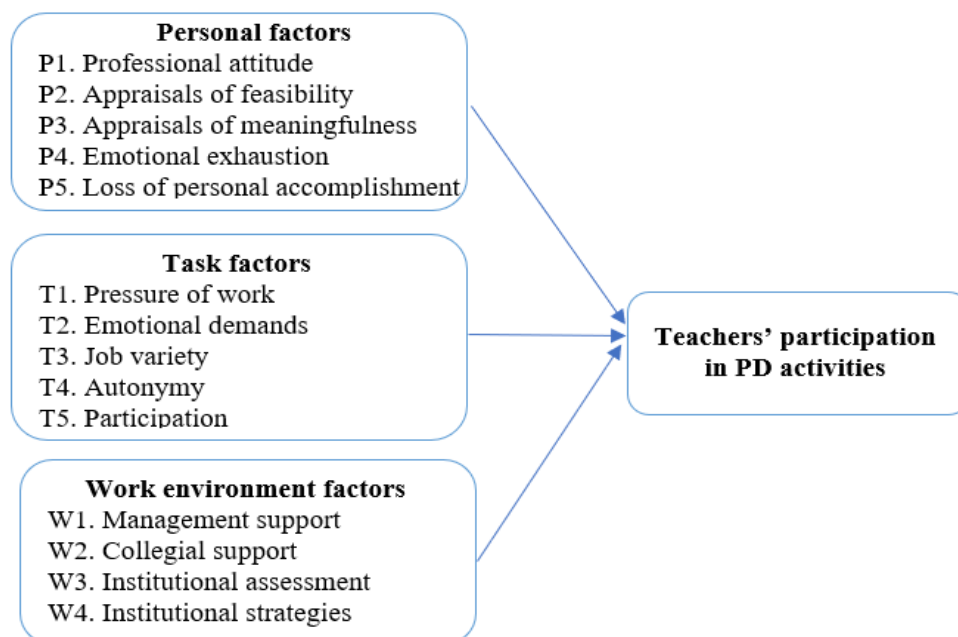


Fig.1. Research model of PD activities (adapted from Kwakman, 2003)

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing individual semi-structured interviews to explore young English lecturers' perceptions and practice of PD activities at Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI). Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in responses while ensuring that key themes are addressed, providing rich and nuanced data. The interviews include 2 parts. The four first interview questions were raised to seek the young lecturers' views and attitudes toward the importance of PD in their teaching careers. The next eight interview questions aim to ask about the level of preference of participants for PD in terms of personal factors, task factors, and work environment factors.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 11 young English lecturers who had less than five years of teaching experience at HaUI. They delivered lessons in English to non-English majored students, English-majored students, and students of English as a medium of instruction programs. It was noted that there was only one male respondent teacher and the rest were female ones. Participants were purposefully selected based on their status as early-career lecturers in order to explore their specific challenges and needs in PD. The inclusion criteria ensured that all participants were actively engaged in teaching and had firsthand experience with the university's PD activities. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. Interviews were conducted in person or via an online platform, depending on the availability and preference of participants. A structured interview guide was developed, comprising open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the participants' understanding of PD, engagement in PD activities, challenges encountered, and recommendations for improvement.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical compliance, participants were informed about the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by coding participants from L#1 to L#11 and securely storing all interview recordings and transcripts. Permission was sought to audio-record interviews to facilitate accurate transcription and analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

The collected data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic coding was employed to identify recurring patterns and significant themes across participants' responses. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report.

By employing a qualitative methodology, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of PD for young English lecturers, providing insights that can inform institutional policies and enhance faculty development programs at HAU and beyond.

4. Findings

4.1. Young lecturers' perceptions of PD

All eleven interviewees expressed a generally positive perception of the benefits of PD activities. Most of the interviewed lecturers shared their perspectives on the necessity of PD in their career. They claimed that *"PD is very essential for young lecturers"* because it helps young lecturers *"improve their expertise"*, *"enhance teaching and research skills"* as well as *"adapt well to the requirements of university education innovation"* (L#3, 6, 8, 9, 10).

In addition, all lecturers highly appreciated the importance of participating in PD activities which helps them consolidate their knowledge and confidence in their teaching career. *"Participating in this activity helps me feel a sense of pride, thereby promoting the development and engagement of my teaching."* (L#5).

It is noticeable that most of the interviewees shared their interest in peer observation from which they learnt new innovative teaching pedagogies and teaching tools. They informed that while watching their colleagues' lectures, they could *"gain a lot of new things, both in teaching techniques and professional style"* (L#1, 4, 7) or *"learn how to effectively use ICT tools to enhance students' learning outcomes"* (L#3, 8, 11). They were eager to gain invaluable experience from their colleagues during classroom observation: *"Because I am still young, learning more experience is extremely important."* (L#1).

4.2. Personal factors

Within the contemporary educational landscape, the PD of young lecturers is increasingly influenced by various personal factors, including professional attitudes, appraisals of feasibility and meaningfulness in their roles, and the emotional toll of exhaustion and perceived loss of personal achievement. A significant finding from this study indicates that professional attitudes play a crucial role in shaping lecturers' approaches to their teaching, with positive attitudes correlating with stronger appraisals of both feasibility and meaningfulness in their work. *"In my opinion, the more chances of developing my professional skills I have, the more I can be confident and engaged in my teaching career."* (L#4). This study revealed a notable finding that positive professional attitudes significantly correlate with strong appraisals of both feasibility and meaningfulness in teaching tasks. *"In my opinion, participating in workshops, courses, and research projects directly related to my field can help facilitate the application of new knowledge and skills to my teaching and research."* (L#3, 5, 9). or *"I really love the emotion of completing any PD courses or workshops, seminars. These activities support me much and I usually adopt what I learnt into my teaching lessons."* (L#11).

Furthermore, emotional exhaustion was found to negatively impact these appraisals, suggesting that as young lecturers experience higher levels of burnout, their perception of the feasibility and

significance of their roles diminishes. L#10 indicated that *"The biggest challenge I'm facing is due to the workload being assigned to tight deadlines without any specific guidance, I cannot find ready and willing for attending PD activities"*. L#2 linked less engagement in PD activities with time constraints and workload: *"I could not find a suitable time to attend any PD activities at my university because my teaching timetable was quite condensed and overloaded. I think I will join in the future whenever I have free time"*.

4.3. Task factors

Understanding the significance of task factors in the PD of young lecturers is crucial to enhancing their effectiveness and well-being. Task factors such as work pressure, emotional demands, job variety, autonomy, and participation are intertwined, shaping the experiences of educators and their subsequent growth. The findings of this research showed the lecturers' various concerns and considerable impact of task factors on their PD. As L#11 confessed *"I really love attending workshops and conferences organized for teachers at our university, but I still have a lot of upcoming deadlines so that I cannot spend time joining these events..."*

Another lecturer reported that emotional demands affect their determination to participate in PD activities: *"...many seminars were arranged at the weekends or late in the evening or coincide with my teaching hours, although I found them very interesting, it is impossible for me to attend."* (L#1). *"The pressure of teaching and scientific research makes it difficult for me to spend time attending long-term training courses."* (L#8)

One more factor issue was informed to have influences on PD activities of young lecturers is their variety of teaching knowledge and demand. L#7 indicated that *"I teach English for first-year non-English majors, in maybe level A2, so some workshops of linguistics, academic research or data analysis seem not to suit my teaching much. I cannot learn much from attending that kind of workshop. However, I am very interested in the workshops of teaching and learning English or applying ICTs in teaching. I usually apply this knowledge into my teaching after the workshops..."*

In short, the interplay of various task factors such as work pressure, emotional demands, job variety, autonomy, and participation have profound implications on the PD of young English lecturers. The findings indicate that increased work pressure and emotional labor, especially under the influence of neoliberal policies in higher education, can lead to burnout, impeding the decision to participate in or satisfaction with PD activities.

4.4. Work environment factors

The PD of young English lecturers is profoundly influenced by various work environment factors, including management support, collegial interactions, and institutional frameworks. An enabling work environment fosters a sense of accountability and security among educators, which is crucial for their growth and effectiveness in teaching roles. This research revealed the significant roles of the working environment in the young lecturers' PD activities. Some of the interviewees shared their recognition of collegial support in nurturing collaboration and shared learning experiences, essential for fostering innovation and pedagogical improvement among academic staff (L#2,6,8), their awareness of being a part of a PD community to get the permission from the institutional managers to attend all the PD workshops or conferences in their needs (L#3,5), their contributions to the PD activities held at the university.

L#7 reported that *"I have attended training courses on teaching methods, technology applications in teaching and workshops on academic writing skills, factors affecting teaching and learning. The activity that I found most useful was the course on some ICT applications that helped me improve the effectiveness of teaching in class and online. I learnt a lot from my colleagues' shares and experiences to develop my career..."*.

Similarly, L#4 said *"The current training programs organized at the university are very responsive to the needs of young lecturers. The university is offering many training courses to improve research capacity and teaching skills, which I am very grateful for."*

The examination of work environment factors such as management support, collegial support, institutional assessment, and institutional strategies underscores their critical role in the PD of young English lecturers. As evidenced by the findings, effective management practices and robust collegial networks are instrumental in fostering a positive teaching and learning environment, ultimately enhancing lecturer effectiveness.

5. Discussion

The findings from the interviews show that young lecturers at HaUI appreciate the value of PD in improving teaching quality and research capabilities. However, certain problems and constraints remain, which must be addressed in order to improve the effectiveness of these initiatives.

First, the English lecturers stressed that PD is an ongoing process of increasing knowledge, teaching abilities, and research competences. They realize the importance of modernizing teaching approaches, incorporating technology into instruction, and honing scientific research abilities. This finding is consistent with several studies (Ozkan, 2015; Ghani & Ghani, 2021). Nonetheless, some lecturers struggle to balance their time between teaching, research, and participating in PD programs. This emphasizes the importance of better time management and institutional assistance to help them engage in PD activities.

Second, while the English lecturers appreciate the university's internal training programs and institutional assistance, they also note that these programs occasionally fail to fulfill their individual needs. Furthermore, financial and time constraints make attending external training courses or international conferences difficult. These results are in line with Kwakman (2003). These problems highlight the need of adapting PD programs to individual needs, as well as providing necessary financial and logistical assistance. In addition, the findings revealed a clear connection between positive professional attitudes and enhanced perceptions of both feasibility and meaningfulness in teaching, suggesting that lecturers with favorable attitudes are more likely to feel competent and fulfilled in their roles (Mukundan et al., 2024).

Third, many lecturers have successfully incorporated the knowledge and skills acquired through training programs to their teaching methods, consequently improving lecture quality and increasing student engagement. However, some instructors have difficulty putting this knowledge into reality due to a lack of institutional support or access to crucial resources and equipment. This shows that the institution should prioritize providing a more conducive atmosphere that allows lecturers to effectively incorporate innovative teaching methodologies and technologies.

Finally, the lecturers voiced a strong desire for the university to establish more particular support policies, such as boosting financing for training programs, facilitating participation in international conferences, and encouraging a collaborative and creative work environment. These measures would not only help young teachers advance in their careers, but would also help to improve the university's academic standards in general Kwakman (2003). Additionally, institutional strategies focusing on stakeholder involvement, as noted in (Sabban & Herawan, 2023), could facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of quality improvement within educational settings, ensuring that professional development initiatives are sustainable and aligned with institutional goals.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the goal of this study was to learn about the perspectives and practices of young English lecturers at Hanoi University of Industry in terms of PD. The most notable finding is that all young English lecturers recognize the value of PD events that allow them to not only sharpen and enhance their teaching and classroom management skills, but also to grow their contacts with other colleagues. The majority of PD events attract young academics who are just starting out in their careers. Higher education institutions can develop a culture of ongoing professional improvement by addressing the highlighted problems and implementing the recommended solutions, resulting in improved educational and research outcomes.

For the university, HaUI should create customized PD programs for lecturers to meet their unique demands. This entails providing a wide range of training possibilities, from modern teaching approaches to advanced research skills. Furthermore, the institution should enhance its investment in financial and time resources to allow academics to participate in high-quality training programs both domestically and globally. Access to current infrastructure and technology tools is also essential for lecturers to properly employ their newly gained expertise in teaching and research. Furthermore, HaUI should encourage and enable lecturers' attendance at academic conferences, research collaborations, and foreign partnerships with the goal to extend their professional horizons.

Young lecturers should pursue PD activities that correspond with their career ambitions. They should regularly apply new information and abilities to their teaching and research methods to ensure continued PD. Collaboration with coworkers to exchange experiences and learn from one another is also critical for their development. Young lecturers who take control of their PD can improve their teaching effectiveness and contribute more significantly to the university's academic purpose.

Improving professors' professional competencies will enhance the educational quality at HaUI. Students will benefit from having access to current knowledge as well as developing important skills for the labor market. A highly competent and motivated teaching team will also improve the university's reputation and status within Vietnam's higher education system and on a global scale. HaUI may assure long-term increases in educational quality and academic performance by investing in instructors' PD.

Acknowledgement: *This research is funded by Hanoi University of Industry under the project No.38-2024-RD/HĐ-ĐHCN. We are grateful for this support.*

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Nhận thức và thực hành của giảng viên tiếng Anh trẻ về các hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn tại một trường đại học công lập ở Hà Nội

Tóm tắt: Giáo viên đóng vai trò then chốt trong quá trình giảng dạy, tuy nhiên, khi mới bắt đầu sự nghiệp, họ thường đối mặt với không ít khó khăn trong việc cải thiện chiến lược giảng dạy để đạt được hiệu quả cao trong công tác giảng dạy. Các hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn (PTCM) là công cụ hiệu quả hỗ trợ giáo viên, đặc biệt là những giáo viên mới, trong việc nâng cao các kỹ năng cần thiết để giảng dạy đạt chất lượng cao. Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu quan điểm của các giảng viên trẻ về PTCM ở cấp độ đại học và các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến việc tham gia các hoạt động PTCM của họ. Sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính, nghiên cứu này tiến hành các cuộc phỏng vấn với 11 giảng viên tiếng Anh trẻ tại một trường đại học ở Hà Nội, Việt Nam. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy, mặc dù các giảng viên tiếng Anh trẻ có nhận thức tích cực về PTCM, họ vẫn gặp phải một số trở ngại khi tham gia vào các hoạt động này. Nghiên cứu cung cấp những thông tin hữu ích về lựa chọn ưu tiên của các giảng viên tiếng Anh trẻ đối với PTCM và các rào cản mà họ gặp phải, đồng thời đề xuất rằng các nhà hoạch định giáo dục cần cung cấp sự hỗ trợ cụ thể và thiết kế các chương trình PTCM phù hợp để hỗ trợ các giảng viên tiếng Anh mới trong giai đoạn đầu sự nghiệp giảng dạy.

Từ khóa: Phát triển chuyên môn; giảng viên trẻ; nhận thức; tiếng Anh.