

## TEACHER CHANGE FOLLOWING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ENGAGEMENT: AN INVESTIGATION WITH EFL UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

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### ABSTRACT

As our world continues to evolve and education reforms are in progress, teacher change has become a focal point of attention. Teachers need to adapt themselves to meet new demands. This study examines teachers' changes due to their engagement in professional development. The study involved thirty-two English as a foreign language teachers from two universities in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Data on the changes teachers experienced after participating in professional development were collected using a questionnaire, and descriptive statistical tests were used to analyze the data. The results show that, over their careers, teachers took part in various professional development activities, which helped them make positive changes in their cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains. These findings highlight the potential of professional development to foster teacher change and improve the quality of education.

### KEYWORDS

Teacher change  
Professional development  
Engagement  
University teachers  
English as a foreign language

## SỰ THAY ĐỔI CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN SAU KHI THAM GIA HOẠT ĐỘNG PHÁT TRIỂN CHUYÊN MÔN: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU VỚI GIẢNG VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC DẠY TIẾNG ANH NHƯ MỘT NGOẠI NGỮ

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### TÓM TẮT

Trong bối cảnh thế giới không ngừng phát triển và cải cách giáo dục vẫn diễn ra không ngừng, sự thay đổi của giảng viên luôn là một vấn đề được quan tâm sâu sắc. Giảng viên cần thay đổi bản thân để có thể đáp ứng các yêu cầu mới. Bài báo này phân tích thực trạng về sự thay đổi của giảng viên sau khi tham gia các hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn. Đối tượng nghiên cứu bao gồm ba mươi hai giảng viên giảng dạy tiếng Anh tại hai trường đại học ở Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long, Việt Nam. Dữ liệu về những thay đổi mà giảng viên đã trải qua sau quá trình thực hiện các hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn được thu thập thông qua bảng hỏi. Các phương pháp thống kê mô tả được sử dụng để phân tích dữ liệu. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy trong quá trình công tác, giảng viên đã tham gia nhiều hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn khác nhau và điều đó đã giúp họ có được những thay đổi tích cực trong khía cạnh nhận thức, hành vi cũng như tình cảm. Kết quả này khẳng định tiềm năng thúc đẩy sự thay đổi của giảng viên thông qua các hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn để nâng cao chất lượng giáo dục.

### TỪ KHÓA

Sự thay đổi của giảng viên  
Phát triển chuyên môn  
Sự tham gia  
Giảng viên  
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## 1. Introduction

Human resources always play a crucial role in development. In many countries, including Vietnam, education is considered a national policy because the product of education is people. Teacher education and training are always of great concern in building a qualified teaching staff that meets innovation requirements. Pre-service teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to become effective teachers. Afterward, in-service teachers are continuously trained to improve their expertise. Participation in professional development (PD) has become a task teachers must perform during their career journey to face the challenges of constant changes in teaching materials, techniques, and methods [1] and the transience of professional knowledge [2]. This shows the importance of PD engagement in the education sector. In the context of strong educational reform, teachers' participation in PD has received even more attention as it is closely connected to teacher change, a key factor in educational reform and social development. In Vietnam, university teachers are required to engage in PD to effectively perform their roles, which go beyond general English teaching to include curriculum design, academic advising, or research supervision. PD activities of university teachers are self-initiated or institution-led activities aiming to improve individual and institutional development [3]. They consist of formal PD (e.g., workshops, conferences, meetings or courses) and job-embedded PD (e.g., lesson observation, coaching or mentoring, study groups, reflective practices, action research, or sharing of best practices) [4].

Several recent studies have investigated teachers' engagement in PD and teacher change. Mahmoudi and Özkan [5] compared the perceptions of novice and experienced Turkish language teachers regarding PD. They found that teachers' choices of PD were completely different. Most experienced teachers indicated that they frequently participated in mentoring or peer coaching, reading professional literature, conferences, and seminars. Meanwhile, less experienced teachers reported their regular participation in courses/workshops, professional communities, and reading professional literature. However, PD helped teachers explore new roles, foster new instructional techniques and teaching methodologies, enhance their practice, and develop themselves professionally and individually.

In Indonesia, EFL teachers' experiences of PD were explored by Hartono [6]. Interviews with six teachers from four universities showed that PD was perceived as an activity that could help them become competent teachers. Thanks to a variety of PD activities (e.g., seminars, conferences, workshops, writing scholarly articles, conducting research, having publications, joining professional organizations, reading and finding sources, developing teaching methods, becoming a coach, examiner, or a teacher trainer), teachers could gain more knowledge that supported their professional growth. Hartono also found that EFL teachers' participation in ongoing PD became part of individual efforts rather than institutional requirements, as they had to determine how to be involved in PD.

In the Republic of Benin, Agbayahoun [7] surveyed 157 secondary EFL teachers to explore their views on PD. The results showed that teachers frequently engaged in one-shot courses that followed top-down models, but these activities could not help teachers enhance their skills in reflection and action on practice. Additionally, teachers were not accustomed to other PD activities such as action research, reading research findings in the field, peer observation, mentoring, or networking. The participants also reflected that although top-down PD exposed them to informative input, these opportunities did not significantly influence their teaching and student outcomes.

In Iran, Nazari and Xodabande [8] investigated how five EFL teachers transformed their beliefs and practices regarding mobile phone usage in language teaching after a ten-week PD program focused on mobile phone integration. The findings revealed shifts in teachers' beliefs about the educational potential of mobile phones. Moreover, the integration of mobile phones into language classrooms increased, especially among teachers who had not used them frequently.

In Vietnam, Ha and Murray [9] conducted a qualitative study to explore how ten Vietnamese EFL high school teachers' beliefs regarding oral corrective feedback (CF) changed after a PD program. The program included a workshop and follow-up experiential and reflective activities such as peer observation or self-video-recorded lesson reflections. The results indicate that the program raised teachers' consciousness of giving CF and choosing appropriate feedback types. However, most teachers retained their beliefs about errors that need correction and potential helpful sources of corrective feedback.

In another study, Nguyen et al. [10] explored how eighty EFL high school teachers participated in PD and their perceptions of the impacts of PD. Data from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews revealed that teachers participated in institution-internal or in-house PD activities on an occasional basis. Also, PD has positively reinforced teachers' language proficiency, teaching practice, and planning practical lessons to meet students' learning needs.

Regarding the university setting, Nguyen and Newton [11] examined the perceptions of six EFL teachers about the effects of a professional program in pronunciation teaching on their knowledge and pronunciation teaching skills. The findings showed that the workshop positively impacted teachers' pedagogical knowledge and pronunciation teaching practices. Teachers implemented what they learned from the program into their pronunciation teaching practices. The results indicated that workshops can effectively promote teacher change.

Research on teachers' engagement in PD and its contribution to teacher change has been conducted in various contexts using diverse methodologies. The results of the studies highlight the positive impacts of PD engagement by demonstrating its role in transforming teachers' knowledge or beliefs regarding their profession and their teaching and learning practices. In Vietnam, several studies have examined teacher change following PD participation. However, these studies primarily focus on secondary or high schools. Research on teacher change in university settings remains scarce. Moreover, most existing studies are qualitative or small in scale, limiting the generalizability of their findings. This gap highlights the necessity for quantitative research involving larger samples to better understand teacher change following PD within Vietnamese university contexts, which may have distinctive features compared with school contexts. Accordingly, the present study examined how EFL teachers at two universities in the Mekong Delta engage in PD and how they have changed due to PD engagement.

The study aimed to answer two research questions:

- *How have Vietnamese EFL university teachers engaged in PD?*
- *What changes have teachers undergone as a result of PD engagement?*

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research design and research instrument**

The present research is a descriptive study exploring teachers' PD engagement and subsequent changes. The researchers designed a questionnaire based on the existing literature on teacher change and PD to capture data. The questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in the field and piloted before being administered to ensure its reliability and validity.

The questionnaire comprises three main sections investigating the participants' demographic background, their engagement in PD, and the changes they have undergone after PD engagement. The first section of the questionnaire contains six closed-ended questions for which the participants tick the most appropriate answers. In part two, nine five-point Likert scale questions were used to collect data on participants' experiences. Section three comprises twenty-eight five-point Likert scale questions investigating changes teachers have undergone due to PD engagement.

### **2.2. Research sites and participants**

The study was conducted at two universities in the Mekong Delta. These universities were

chosen based on convenience. The researchers chose these universities due to their established relationships with them, ensuring easier data collection. The participants included thirty-two EFL teachers selected based on three criteria: voluntary participation in the study, being full-time teachers, and having at least one year of experience as a full-time teacher at the university.

### 2.3. Data collection and analysis

The data was collected through a questionnaire. The researchers contacted the target participants, arranged a meeting to explain the purpose of the study, and invited them to participate. The participants were encouraged to raise questions if they needed more detailed information. Those who agreed to participate were allowed to respond electronically via a Google Form or paper-based form, depending on their preferred reading mode, to ensure the participants' comfort.

The data were analyzed using SPSS 26. The Reliability test was run to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. The test result yielded a high Cronbach's Alpha of 0.959, indicating strong questionnaire reliability. Descriptive statistical tests such as Descriptives and Frequencies were also conducted to measure the items' mean scores, frequencies, and standard deviation. The mean scores were interpreted using the framework of scale interpretation provided by [10] as follows: *Strongly disagree* in the point range of 1.00- 1.80, *Disagree* 1.81 - 2.60, *Neutral* 2.61 – 3.40, *Agree* 3.41 - 4.20, and *Strongly agree* 4.21 - 5.00.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Findings on teachers' engagement in PD

Descriptive statistical tests were run to measure the degree to which teachers participated in PD. The overall mean score of the nine items related to teachers' engagement in PD was 3.92 (SD = 0.443), indicating that the extent of teachers' engagement in PD is high. Table 1 presents the results of the tests for the nine items in the cluster.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics on teachers' engagement in PD

Items	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly agree and agree (%)
1. I have engaged in various PD activities.	4.16	0.628	0	12.5	87.5
2. I have engaged in PD regularly as a habit.	3.78	0.751	6.3	21.9	71.8
3. I have engaged in PD required by my organization.	3.91	0.893	9.4	15.6	75
4. I have engaged in PD, which helps address issues in my work.	4.00	1.016	9.4	12.5	78.1
5. I have engaged in PD that I am invited to.	3.81	0.965	9.4	18.8	71.9
6. I have engaged in PD that aligns with my personal interests or available time.	3.56	1.162	21.9	21.9	56.3
7. I have engaged in formal PD.	3.72	0.683	3.1	31.3	65.7
8. I have engaged in informal and collaborative PD.	3.97	0.695	0	25.0	75.0
9. I have engaged in self-directed PD.	4.34	0.653	0	9.4	90.6

The mean scores of all nine items exceeded 3.4, indicating teachers' overall agreement with the ideas. The strongest agreement was observed for item 9 (M = 4.34, SD = 0.653), with over 90% of teachers reporting participation in self-directed PD. Similarly, item 1 got a high mean score of 4.16 (SD = 0.628) and agreement from nearly 90% of teachers, indicating that teachers engaged in various PD activities. Regarding the frequency of PD engagement, around 71% of teachers agreed that participating in PD is their routine (M = 3.78, SD = 0.751). The lowest mean score was recorded for the item about engaging in PD activities appropriate to personal interest and available time (M = 3.56, SD = 1.162), showing that these two personal factors might not influence teachers' decisions to participate in PD. Meanwhile, nearly 80% of teachers reported

participating in PD activities that help them solve their teaching problems ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.016$ ). About three-quarters of teachers participated in mandatory PD activities ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 0.893$ ) or informal and collaborative ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 0.695$ ). Moreover, about two-thirds of teachers also engaged in PD opportunities that are formally organized ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.683$ ) and the ones that teachers are invited to ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 0.965$ ).

### 3.2. Findings on teacher change following PD engagement

Descriptive statistical tests were conducted to measure the changes in teachers' cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains after their engagement in PD. The results showed that PD engagement has resulted in teacher change in all three domains. The overall mean score for teacher change was 4.30 ( $SD = 0.501$ ), indicating a strong agreement among teachers that their participation in PD facilitated their transformation. The mean scores for the three domains of change (e.g., cognitive, behavioral, and affective) were 4.37 ( $SD = 0.497$ ), 4.26 ( $SD = 0.540$ ), and 4.25 ( $SD = 0.566$ ), respectively, suggesting that teachers perceived positive changes across all areas as a result of their PD engagement.

#### 3.2.1. Teacher change in the cognitive domain

The results regarding teacher change in the cognitive domain are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics on teacher change in the cognitive domain

Items	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly agree and agree (%)
<i>PD engagement has helped me.....</i>					
1. have a clear understanding of the content of the subject I am teaching.	4.56	0.564	0	3.1	96.9
2. have a clear understanding of how to carry out the teaching process.	4.41	0.615	0	6.3	93.7
3. have a clear understanding of how to use teaching materials to support teaching.	4.37	0.609	0	6.3	93.7
4. have a clear understanding of how to implement differentiated teaching.	4.19	0.780	0	21.9	78.1
5. be aware of the influences of learners' variables.	4.31	0.592	0	6.3	93.7
6. recognize the changes occurring in the field of English teaching.	4.06	0.759	6.3	6.3	87.4
7. be aware of the role of the teacher in the teaching process and PD.	4.47	0.507	0	0	100
8. recognize the necessity of engaging in PD activities to become an effective teacher.	4.50	0.508	0	0	100
9. recognize the PD path that suits my personal needs.	4.34	0.653	0	9.4	90.6
10. be aware of the importance of teacher change in enhancing the quality of education.	4.44	0.504	0	0	100

The mean scores of the items ranged from 4.06 to 4.56, with the percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed ranging from 78.1 percent to 100 percent. This reflects that teachers valued the positive influence of PD engagement on changes in their cognitive domain. Teachers agreed that PD engagement resulted in their identification of changes in English language teaching ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.759$ ) and understanding how to implement differentiated instruction ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 0.780$ ). Remarkably, they strongly agreed on the contribution of PD in enhancing their knowledge about the subjects they are teaching ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 0.564$ ), how to carry out the teaching process ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 0.615$ ), how to use supplementary teaching materials and

facilities ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 0.609$ ) or learners' variables ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 0.592$ ). Besides that, there was a strong agreement among teachers that PD engagement facilitated teachers' realization of their effective PD pathways ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 0.653$ ). Importantly, all teachers acknowledged that PD helped them recognize their roles in teaching and learning for professional growth and the significance of PD and teacher change in education. These items got very high mean scores of 4.47 ( $SD = 0.507$ ), 4.50 ( $SD = 0.508$ ) and 4.44 ( $SD = 0.504$ ) respectively.

### 3.2.2. Teacher change in the behavioral domain

Table 3 presents the results for nine items about teacher change in the behavioral domain.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics on teacher change in the behavioral domain

Items	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly agree and agree (%)
<i>PD engagement has helped me.....</i>					
1. apply advanced methods acquired from PD activities into practices.	4.19	0.644	0	12.5	87.5
2. diversify learning and teaching activities.	4.28	0.683	0	12.5	87.5
3. actively participate in curriculum development.	4.16	0.723	0	18.8	81.2
4. collaborate well with colleagues.	4.28	0.634	0	9.4	90.6
5. interact effectively with learners.	4.44	0.564	0	3.1	96.9
6. actively reflect on my professional practice.	4.34	0.701	0	12.5	87.5
7. proactively seek new PD opportunities.	4.22	0.706	0	15.6	85.4
8. carry out professional tasks effectively.	4.25	0.762	3.1	9.4	87.5
9. support the community in developing the qualities of lifelong learners.	4.19	0.693	0	15.6	84.4

The mean scores of these items ranged from 4.16 to 4.44, with the percentage of teachers who agreed and strongly agreed with the items ranging from 81.2 percent to 96.9 percent. These findings indicate teachers' positive reception of PD as a driver of changes in their behavioral practices. Specifically, teachers expressed their strongest agreement with the item about the facilitating role of PD in their interaction with students ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 0.564$ ). The five items assessing the impact of PD on teachers' diversification of teaching and learning activities, communication with colleagues, reflection on a teaching career, pursuit of PD opportunities, and execution of professional tasks saw teachers' strong agreement with high mean scores of 4.28 ( $SD = 0.683$ ), 4.28 ( $SD = 0.634$ ), 4.34 ( $SD = 0.701$ ), 4.22 ( $SD = 0.706$ ), 4.25 ( $SD = 0.762$ ) respectively. The remaining three items addressing teachers' active participation in curriculum development and integration of modern teaching methods into their practices and their support for the community in fostering the qualities of life-long learners also received strong agreements, with the mean scores of 4.16 ( $SD = 0.723$ ), 4.19 ( $SD = 0.644$ ) and 4.19 ( $SD = 0.693$ ) respectively.

### 3.2.3. Teacher change in the affective domain

The mean scores for the nine items measuring teachers' changes in affective domain items ranged from 4.09 to 4.38, with 78.1% to 93.7% of teachers indicating agreement or strong agreement. The findings reveal teachers' recognition of positive changes in their affect thanks to engaging in PD. The item concerning how open teachers are to PD and educational change, with the highest mean score of 4.38 ( $SD = 0.609$ ), suggests that PD engagement might significantly impact teachers' attitudes towards PD and change. Teachers also expressed their strong agreement with the items investigating how PD bettered their motivation to improve teaching quality ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 0.644$ ), their confidence in their competencies ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = 0.706$ ), their sense of responsibility for their work ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 0.634$ ), their enthusiasm for PD engagement ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 0.683$ ), their satisfaction with the benefits of PD ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD =$

0.592) and their sense of pride in acquiring qualities of effective teachers ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 0.718$ ). Additionally, teachers agreed that PD participation helped them to get an emotional connection with their stakeholders and to be recognized for their professional competence and qualities have mean scores of 4.16 ( $SD = 0.723$ ) and 4.09 ( $SD = 0.734$ ), respectively, showing teachers' agreement with these affective changes as a result of their engagement in PD.

Table 4 presents the results for nine items about teacher change in the affective domain.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics on teacher change in the affective domain

Item	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly agree and agree (%)
<i>PD engagement has helped me feel...</i>					
1. motivated to improve my teaching quality.	4.31	0.644	0	9.4	90.6
2. confident in my competencies.	4.22	0.706	0	15.6	84.4
3. a greater sense of responsibility for work.	4.28	0.634	0	9.4	90.6
4. enthusiastic about engaging in PD activities to become a life-long learner and a change agent.	4.28	0.683	0	12.5	87.5
5. more open to educational change and PD.	4.38	0.609	0	6.3	93.7
6. a strong emotional connection to my work, colleagues, learners, or professional community.	4.16	0.723	0	18.8	81.2
7. recognized for my professional competencies and my qualities as a teacher.	4.09	0.734	0	21.9	78.1
8. delighted because PD always brings me certain benefits.	4.31	0.592	0	6.3	93.7
9. proud of having developed the qualities of a good teacher.	4.25	0.718	0	15.6	84.4

### 3.2.3. Discussion

The findings showed that teachers participated in various activities to enhance their qualities and competencies. PD engagement was a regular part of teachers' professional lives. PD activities teachers took part in ranged from top-down PD (e.g., formal or mandatory activities) to bottom-up PD (e.g., informal, collaborative, and self-directed activities). These findings align with those of [5] and [6], who found that teachers engaged in diverse PD activities for professional growth. As the results documented by [5] and [6], university teachers could self-study by reading or finding resources. They could also do job-embedded PD, such as developing teaching methods, being an examiner, or being involved in research. Moreover, they might participate in traditional PD, such as seminars and conferences, or collaborative PD by joining a professional organization, engaging in informal dialogue with colleagues, or being a coach. This consensus may derive from the fact that PD engagement is one of the main duties that teachers have to do to ensure their work efficiency. Especially at universities, teachers have multiple roles and responsibilities, so they are always required to participate in PD to improve themselves to meet evolving requirements.

Participating in PD resulted in a noticeable transformation in teachers' cognitive and behavioral domains. These findings align in part with what was found in other studies. In some previous studies, PD was revealed to help teachers explore new roles [5], acquire more knowledge for their professional growth [6], and improve pedagogical knowledge [11]. Moreover, PD was found to help university teachers foster new instructional techniques and teaching methodologies, thereby enhancing their teaching practices [5], [6] and [11]. Consistent with these findings, the present study identified several changes teachers have undergone in their understanding and practices of EFL teaching.

Besides that, the findings also revealed new insights about how teachers transformed their cognition and practices regarding PD, which had not been fully mentioned in previous studies.

Through PD engagement, teachers developed a greater recognition of the role of PD and teacher change and identified their appropriate PD pathways. More importantly, they adopted a more active and responsible role in their PD and the others' PD. Another remarkable finding identified in this study is that teachers built up a range of positive emotional states, such as increased confidence, motivation, responsibility, connection, or pride due to their participation in PD. This finding helps to provide a more comprehensive perspective on teacher change, complementing and expanding upon previous research.

#### 4. Conclusion

The present study indicates that PD engagement significantly contributed to teacher change. PD helps teachers deepen their knowledge, understanding, or awareness regarding EFL teaching and teacher PD. Furthermore, it led to a notable transformation in their teaching and learning practices. Significantly, it resulted in positive changes in teachers' affective domain. These findings highlight the role of PD in facilitating teacher change. Therefore, teachers should seize opportunities for PD to improve their qualities and competencies. Moreover, educational institutions and government agencies should actively support and promote teachers' engagement in PD to foster teacher transformation. Further research, using larger sample sizes and diverse methodologies, is needed to understand the change process and identify factors that might facilitate or hinder teacher change after PD engagement.

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