



## Review Article

# Status of Lesson Study in School: Case of Vietnam and Japan

Doan Nguyet Linh<sup>1,\*</sup>, Koji Tsuji<sup>2</sup>, Yuichi Tsuchida<sup>2</sup>, Jun Nomura<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>VNU University of Education, 144 Xuan Thuy, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>Chiba University, Japan

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**Abstract:** What is the status of lesson study in Vietnam and Japan? Is there a significant difference between the teaching experience of secondary school teachers and how they perceive the relevance of lesson study to their professional development in Vietnam and Japan? The mentioned questions were explored by collecting data from high school teachers (n = 197) in Vietnam and Japan through questionnaires. Descriptive statistics are used to analyze the data. The results show that the involvement of secondary school teachers in lesson study and the contribution related to their professional development is very high. It can also be seen that there are significant differences between the teaching experience of secondary school teachers and how they perceive the relevance of lesson study to their professional development. The findings suggest that relevant education policies and appropriate funding need to be implemented to ensure that professional learning communities remain vibrant in both Vietnam and Japan. This is the key to enhancing secondary teacher competence, which can lead to higher student learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Lesson study, professional development, teacher, Vietnam, Japan.

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, school reform efforts have recognized teacher professional development as a key component of change and as an important link between the standards movement and student achievement. As students are expected to learn more complex and analytical skills in preparation for further education and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers must learn to teach in ways that develop higher-

order thinking and performance. These new standards require a new kind of teaching, conducted by “teachers who understand learning as well as teaching, who can address students’ needs as well as the demands of their disciplines, and who can create bridges between students’ experiences and curriculum goals” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, pp. 5) [1]. Efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice and the capacity of school systems to advance teacher learning. This study, therefore, set out to contribute to the educational research literature by establishing the status of lesson study Vietnam and Japan as

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [linhdn@vnu.edu.vn](mailto:linhdn@vnu.edu.vn)

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a case. The study also examines whether there is a significant difference between the teaching experience of secondary teachers and how they perceive the relevance of lesson study to their professional development in Vietnam and Japan.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to Peter Dudley, Lesson Study (LS) is an approach to continuing professional development that schools should adopt. LS is the world's fastest-growing approach to teacher learning, and to developing teaching that in turn improves pupil learning. It has transformed the practice of tens of thousands of teachers and educational professionals worldwide. Also, Peter Dudley, assumed that LS is a deceptively simple sequence of collaborative reflection: joint professional development. The beauty of its simplicity is that any small group of teachers can do it. Because it requires no technology or prior experience, it is now in use in many developing countries worldwide. The danger in the simplicity of LS, however, is that it is easily adapted and corrupted by a teaching profession that too often has been encouraged simply to innovate for innovation's sake, to play fast and loose with an "adapt adopt" approach to practice transfer and which even in the twenty-first century, is still unused to adopting professional levels of clinical discipline when applying and honing classroom interventions or innovations [2].

Lesson study is a collaboration-based teacher professional development approach that originated in Japan (Fernandez and Yoshida, 2004; Lewis and Tsuchida, 1998; Stigler and Hiebert, 1999) [3].

As John Elliot (2019) stated, with lesson study, improving teaching takes place in the context of a classroom lesson. Teachers meet together to develop "research lessons". They define a problem to guide their work, plan a lesson, have one teacher teach the lesson while the others observe it, evaluate and reflect on the lesson as a group, revise the lesson, teach the revised lesson, evaluate and reflect once again, and share the results. What is striking about

lesson study is that it is based on a long-term, continuous improvement model [4].

In Lesson Study comes of age in North America, the authors defined that in lesson study, teachers collaboratively plan, observe, and analyze actual classroom lessons, drawing out implications both for the design of specific lessons and for teaching and learning more broadly [5].

Lesson study is a cycle of instructional improvement in which teachers work together to: formulate goals for student learning and long-term development; collaboratively plan a "research lesson" designed to bring to life these goals; conduct the lesson in a classroom, with one team member teaching and others gathering evidence on student learning and development; reflect on and discuss the evidence gathered during the lesson, using it to improve the lesson, the unit, and instruction more generally; and if desired, teach, observe, and improve the lesson again in one or more additional classrooms [6].

"Lesson study" is a professional learning approach in which teachers work together to: formulate goals for student learning and long-term development; collaboratively plan a "research lesson" designed to bring to life these goals; conduct the lesson in a classroom, with one team member teaching and others gathering evidence on student learning and development; and discuss the evidence gathered during the lesson, using it to improve the lesson, the unit, and instruction more generally [7].

According to Linda Sims and Daniel Wahls (2009), lesson study is a simple, cyclical process of planning, observation, reflection, and revision, Lesson Study systematically embeds professional development in the classroom. It is based on the idea that a single lesson contains many (if not all) of the critical components that teachers must consider to improve instruction. Teachers meet to formulate goals for students' learning and long-term development. Through extensive discussion (ideally, the group ranges from new teachers to seasoned veterans), teachers plan a "research lesson" designed to meet their stated goals. One team member

teaches this research lesson while others observe and gather evidence on student learning and engagement. Afterwards, team members debrief, focusing on what was observed and how to revise the lesson to better meet the intended goals. Often, an outside observer is invited to join the group to offer advice as the lesson is developed or provide a summary at the debriefing. A revised lesson is sometimes taught by another group member to a different group of students. The cycle continues with planning, teaching/observation, debriefing, and revising. Finally, teachers synthesize their learning in a report containing a detailed research-lesson plan, summaries of their professional learning, and new questions to consider in subsequent research lessons. [8]

Lesson study is a teaching improvement and knowledge-building process that has origins in Japanese elementary education. In Japanese lessons, study teachers work in small teams to plan, teach, observe, analyze, and refine individual class lessons, called research lessons. Nearly all Japanese teachers participate in a lesson study team during the school year. In addition, they observe research lessons regularly in their schools and at schools that host lesson study open houses. Research lessons are published and widely disseminated throughout the country. In essence, Japanese lesson study is a broad-based, teacher-led system for the improvement of teaching and learning [9].

Lesson study encompasses a “large family of instructional improvement strategies, the shared feature of which is an observation of live classroom lesson by a group of teachers who collect data on teaching and learning and collaboratively analyze it”. Lesson study also involves an interactive component - teachers come together as a group to discuss the best teaching strategies; one person volunteers to teach while others observe. After the trial run out of the lesson, the group comes together again with feedback and suggestions to modify the plan. Improvements to the plan are made, then another instructor teaches while others observe and offer feedback, and so on. Lesson

study is well suited to library instruction because of the nature of our “curriculum”. Librarians teach the same topics over and over again. In addition, many teach students to use this complex and often confusing resource [10].

Lesson Study is a simple idea: If you want to improve instruction, what could be more obvious than collaborating with fellow teachers to plan instruction and examine its impact on students? In Lesson Study, teachers bring their questions to the table and seek answers from one another, from outside specialists and research, and carefully study students. Lesson Study is an inquiry cycle that supports teachers to experiment, observe and improve. As teachers work together to study student learning, schools become places where both students and teachers are passionate about learning [11].

Lesson Study is a form of professional development, which combines continuing and collaborative teacher professional development and curriculum renewal with a special focus on classroom teaching. It is more than just the study of the lesson; it is a systematic inquiry into teaching practice much more broadly defined, which happens to be carried out by examining lessons. Its unique feature lies in the long-term, gradual improvement of practices using a cyclical process of researching instructional techniques [12].

The typical small, but professionally scaled process of Lesson Study generates a collaborative research framework (Matoba & Sarkar Arani, 2006). The Lesson Study approach involves the design of the research lesson as part of an extended sequence of lessons to teach a particular topic, the implementation of the research lesson followed by evaluation and analysis, and then refining of the lesson. Observation of the research lesson by colleagues and other interested persons is an essential part of this approach (Baba, 2007; Sowder, 2007). Having several pairs of eyes looking at the classroom activity gives a more comprehensive view of different aspects [13].

### 3. Research Method

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. This design was considered appropriate because it permits a researcher to obtain useful data in a relatively short period. Put differently, a cross-section design allows data to be collected just once, perhaps over a period of days or weeks or months to answer a research question.

The study involved secondary school teachers in Vietnam and Japan.

The study employed a simple random sampling technique to select secondary school teachers that participated in the study. This technique was preferred because it enables a sample to be obtained from the population in a manner that each element of the sample has an equal chance of being selected. Out of the 197 participants involved in the study, 101 were from Vietnam while 96 were from Japan.

A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not applicable; 2 = Not at all; 3 = Not much; 4 = Much; 5 = Very much) was utilised to measure lesson study profile aspects on the questionnaire. To ensure that the instrument used in the study is valid and reliable, due effort was made to develop the instrument based on existing credible studies.

Data collection was done using a self-administered questionnaire. The use of a questionnaire was considered appropriate because it is widely accepted as an efficient data collection mechanism in a positivist study where the researcher knows exactly what is required and how to measure the variables under investigation. The questionnaire comprised a background information section and the lesson study profile as perceived by the teachers in Vietnam and Japan. The questionnaire was prepared in English as it is the international language the researchers and the respondents could conveniently use. The questionnaire in Vietnam was administered online by the co-author residing in Vietnam while the questionnaire in Japan was personally administered by the co-author residing in Japan.

### 4. Results

Regarding the gender distribution of respondents, 82 (41,6%) were males and 115 (58,4%) were females. Gender statistics from the individual country show that in Vietnam, males were 18 (17,8%) and females are 83 (82,2%) while in Japan, males were 64 (66,7%) and females were 32 (33,3%). When it comes to the teaching experience, the majority of the participants 47 (23,9%) had taught more than 21 years, this was followed by those who had taught 6-10 years (46, 23,4%), 16-20 years (43, 21,8%), 11-15 years (31, 15,7%) and less than 5 years (30, 15,2%). Most of the participants (73, 37,1%) were aged between 36-45 years old, this was followed by those aged between 26 -35 years (63, 32%), 46-55 years (29, 14,7%), below 25 years (13, 6,6%) and only 01 participant was aged more than 56 years in Vietnam while Japan was 18 participants.

Secondary school teachers ( $n = 197$ ) responded to the questionnaire items that were used to measure the status of lesson study in Vietnam and Japan. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the responses (see Table 1). Results reveal that majority of the secondary school teachers in Vietnam and Japan regarding how well-informed they are about involvement in Lesson study communities and whether expectations are clear is “much” (Mean = 3,29; Std. Deviation = 1,042). Findings in this study disclosed that majority of the secondary school teachers regarding the extent they plan lessons together, observe and critique colleagues' lessons and share teaching resources in their lesson study communities is “much” (Mean = 2,85; Std. Deviation = 1,345). The study results depict that majority of the secondary school teachers in Vietnam and Japan analyse student learning to guide instruction as “much” (Mean = 2,67; Std. Deviation = 1,281). The results further unveil that majority of the secondary school teachers discuss interventions for students' academic improvement weekly (Mean = 2,77; Std. Deviation = 1,422).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics regarding professional learning community status as perceived by secondary school teachers in Vietnam and Japan (N = 197)

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am well-informed about involvement in the LS and expectations are clear	3,29	1,042
How often does your LS plan lessons together, observe and critique colleagues' lessons and share teaching resources	2,85	1,345
How often does your LS analyse student learning to guide instruction?	2,67	1,281
discuss interventions for students' academic improvement?	2,77	1,423

## 5. Discussion

This research aimed to establish the status of lesson study in Vietnam and Japan. The study also set out to establish whether there is a significant difference between the teaching experience of secondary teachers and how they perceive the relevance of lesson study on their professional development in Vietnam and Japan. The results show that teachers' participation in lesson study activities is related to their professional development. The teachers have a monthly meeting, and professional activities in the form of lesson study focus on attending time with colleagues; sharing information related to observed lessons; discuss points that need to be corrected after the lesson. Discussion often focuses on lesson content, teaching methods and forms of assessment to develop students' capacity. Research also shows that there are significant differences between the teaching experience of secondary school teachers and how they perceive the relevance of lesson study to their professional development. The findings herein are consistent with the studies conducted by researchers and that lesson study leads to increased effective teaching and learning because teachers can develop better and effective instructional practices [14, 15]. The findings also concur with that lesson study offer professional [16].

Helping teachers understand what lesson research is all about takes time. There may be a gap between the vision, the ideal of lesson study for the sake of developing the learning community, and the teacher's understanding of it. When this happens, school leadership or

someone familiar with the case study needs to step in and further explain the innovation model. It takes time for teachers to become adept at doing lesson research, even if it takes time for them to fully understand it. In Vietnam, the lesson study model is mostly known to teachers as a professional activity.

Many proposals have been made in Japan to improve the quality of lesson study in education. Some teachers argue that they can prepare online lesson study programs, increasing the number of people participating in lesson study because everyone can participate to discuss with coworkers remotely. Furthermore, survey respondents encouraged the spread of innovative technology in schools and assisted teachers in mastering technology. Teachers will easily master lessons and incorporate smart technology into teaching more flexibly and engagingly when they have smart technology applications in their hands. Furthermore, some comments mentioned the infrequent or somewhat limited situation of studying lessons for teachers in Japan. If studying lessons is difficult in Vietnam because teachers lack a professional learning community to study, and most teachers in Japan are said to be too busy and do not have time for lesson study.

To address this issue, several recommendations have been made in Japanese education, including increasing the number of teachers in all subjects and increasing the education budget to provide adequate human and material resources to develop lesson study in high schools. Strengthened guidance from the local government's teacher training centre to

assist teachers in having a professional learning environment and being trained in pedagogical expertise. Financial assistance is also necessary. Teacher salaries in Vietnam and Japan are currently average when compared to expensive expenditures in major cities. Teachers must also cover the costs of learning tools for their students. Furthermore, schools must alleviate the stress of assigning teachers based on a subject. In addition to lecture hours, a teacher usually participates in a variety of activities such as homeroom work and designing educational activities for students who have little time to focus on lesson study.

As a result, many survey respondents advocated for lesson studies to be conducted outside school hours or streamlined during teachers' working hours. It is critical to increase the number of teachers who participate in lesson study. Schools should encourage teachers to collaborate on learning with colleagues to make the best decisions about students' actions or reactions, with assistance from teachers who have taught that lesson. The teachers devised an appropriate teaching schedule.

Schools should also organize training sessions to raise teachers' awareness of lesson study and professional learning communities among teachers in the same subject to provide a learning environment that helps teachers exchange and study lessons with coworkers. It was very important to provide practical ideas that could be applied in the lessons, according to survey participants in Japan. Actual ideas must be experienced by experienced teachers who have taught that lesson to provide accurate advice to teachers. Furthermore, they proposed requirements for teachers, such as being more flexible in accepting new ideas for educational improvement and adapting to put them into practice.

Conducting lesson study is also difficult to change because first of all, each teacher has his teaching history and his own beliefs and ways of teaching. The introduction of lesson study is not to force teachers to radically change their teaching style by ignoring or negating the

previous teaching. One difficulty that both teachers in Japan and Vietnam mentioned is that they think that there is not enough time for activities related to lesson study. Another difference between the situation of lesson study in Vietnam and Japan is that support from university lecturers is highly valued in Vietnam while support from experienced teachers is more appreciated in Japan for lesson study.

## 6. Conclusion

This study successfully established the status of lesson study in Vietnam and Japan and determined whether there is a significant difference between the teaching experience of secondary school teachers and the way they perceive involvement of study lessons for their career development. The findings of this study serve as the basis for policies and management actions focused on ensuring that lesson study is established and that the right conditions are created for teachers' competence to be enhanced. high. This will then lead to high student outcomes and achievement. This rediscovery, therefore, parallels the orientation of the Vietnam National Teacher Policy to improve teacher quality through continuous professional development. In addition, this study confirms that lesson study can be one of the effective measures in teachers' professional activities so that teachers' professional competence can achieve the desired results like in Vietnam.

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