

# English Teaching Performance of the Beginning Teacher at High Schools in Vietnam

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**Abstract:** This study intends to examine how well the beginning English teachers perform their job and examine the differences in satisfaction level with beginning English teachers at high schools based on characteristics such as public/non-public status and location. The framework for teaching performance was adapted from frameworks in Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage (2005) and Ball & Cohen (1999). In this framework, the complex activities of teaching are divided into 24 components clustered into the following 4 domains of teaching: knowledge of subject matter and curriculum, knowledge of teaching, knowledge of learners, professional attitudes and values. The research was carried at high schools in Hanoi and Hochiminh City, two biggest cities in Vietnam. The sample size is 94 head English teachers, asked to evaluate the teaching performance of beginning English teachers in their school. T-test results show that the satisfaction level of head teachers with beginning teachers in non-public schools is higher than in public schools. The quality of beginning English teachers in non-public schools was more highly appreciated than in public schools.

**Keywords:** Beginning teachers, high school, satisfaction.

## 1. Introduction

Since Vietnam implemented *Doimoi*, an open door policy welcoming foreign investment in 1986, the demand for highly qualified human resources has been greater than ever before. This required Vietnamese higher education expansion to fulfill the need of its citizens. However, Vietnam's higher education has not changed fast enough to meet the high demand for trained human resources and international

integration, neither has it been able to produce the educated workforce required to meet the growing and changing needs of an increasingly dynamic economy. English, undeniably, has become a phenomenon in the world and it is an irresistible language. Vietnam is not an exception with regard to the spread of English

Teachers' training programs are held at different levels of educational institutions, namely schools, universities, municipal/provincial Departments of Education and Training, and the Ministry of Education and Training. Besides, there are several foreign-

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funded educational organizations such as UNESCO, British Council, which also offer seminars, workshops, conferences, and teaching materials. However, to become a secondary school teacher, a bachelor's degree which is issued by a teacher training college or university is a prerequisite. This study aims to: (1) to examine how well the beginning English teachers perform their job through the head English teachers' rating; (2) to examine the differences in satisfaction level of head English teachers with newly graduated teachers at high schools based on characteristics such as public/non-public.

## **2. Literature review**

The issue of the quality of teachers has recently been receiving much attention from educators, the public and policy makers. Among all educational resources - teachers' ability is an especially crucial contributor to students' learning (Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2005). Many studies related to the performance of teachers have been conducted. This study is aimed at examining how well the newly graduated English teachers (employed within the last three years) perform their jobs.

The primary purpose of teacher education is to cultivate the knowledge, skills and values that will enable teachers to be highly effective in helping students to learn. It is also to develop the personal resources necessary to foster such learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999). They state that the teachers need to understand the subject matter, student matters, teaching material, pedagogy and learning in and from practice. That knowledge could be used only in complex interaction in the unpredictable situation that we call classroom.

Still, according to Ball and Cohen (1999) and Darling-Hammond (2005), three general

areas of knowledge are important for any teacher to acquire: Knowledge of learners and how they learn and develop within social contexts; An understanding of the subject and skills to be taught in light of the social purposes of education; An understanding of teaching in light of the content and learners to be taught.

Simon (1984) also mentioned such problems of beginning teachers in their first years of teaching such as the reality shock and changes in behaviors and attitudes. The eight problems perceived most often are classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students' work, relationships with parents, organization of class work, inadequate teaching materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students (Simon, 1984)

Nunan (2003) found that most in Vietnam have not had a chance to study in an English-speaking country and many of them do not normally communicate in English and cannot sustain teaching that mainly depends on communicative interactions.

For the role of teacher in teaching and learning activities, traditionally the teacher is considered to be the most powerful person and the centre in the classroom. This viewpoint is influenced by Confucian ideology. Le (1999) states that the environment of English learning in Vietnam can be compared to "a cultural island where the teacher is expected to be the sole provider of experience in the target language". Hall (1998) states, "Teachers who view themselves as leaders of communities of inquiry, who view students as active agents in the learning process and thus take their involvement seriously, are more likely to engage their students in intellectually challenging interactions. Teachers who perceive themselves as authorities of knowledge and students as passive recipients of their

knowledge are more likely to use the standard I-R-E. (I: Teacher initiates; R: Students respond; E: Teacher evaluates)". Undeniably, the model of I-R-E is still quite popular among the majority of Vietnamese teachers.

In summary, from those previous studies, the knowledge of teachers has covered three main domains such knowledge of teaching, knowledge of learners and knowledge of subject. Those knowledge has interacted and been framed by professional attitudes.

### 3. Research methodology

The design of the study for the most part followed the quantitative research methodology despite the fact that the interviews were combined later. The research was carried out on the teaching performance of newly graduated teachers (beginning teachers) at high schools in Hanoi and Hochiminh City. It mainly attempted to examine how well the beginning English teachers and whether the employer satisfaction level with beginning teachers differed among schools with different characteristics.

This study utilized data sources drawn from 94 heads of the English divisions at high schools. The reason for this decision on sampling selection is that head English teachers know a broader segment of a teacher's portfolio, especially those of beginning teachers through peer review. New teachers are supervised, assisted and evaluated by experienced teachers and head teachers. The

head teachers have well understood the limitations and strong points of beginning teachers, and periodically report the evaluation of all English teachers to the principal Board.

In terms of location and type, it can be said that the number of respondent non public schools are 23% and the public schools are 77%. The average number of English teachers in Hanoi and Hochiminh City school is 9.5 per school.

The data analysis was conducted based on the research questions. The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) 19.0 program and Excel 2007 were used for data analysis to generate basic descriptive statistics. T-test was employed to compare the difference in the overall satisfaction level at high schools with different characteristics. This statistical tool provided a meaningful base for comparison between schools that are statistically significant. The internal reliability of the head English teachers' rating of new teachers' performance was at desired criteria  $\alpha = 0.82$ . After the analysis of the results from the surveys, the recorded data from in-depth interviews were transcribed, as were the interview notes.

The framework for teaching performance was adapted from frameworks in Bransford, Darling-Hammond and LePage (2005) and Ball and Cohen (1999). In this framework, the complex activities of teaching are divided into 24 components clustered into the following 4 domains of teaching:

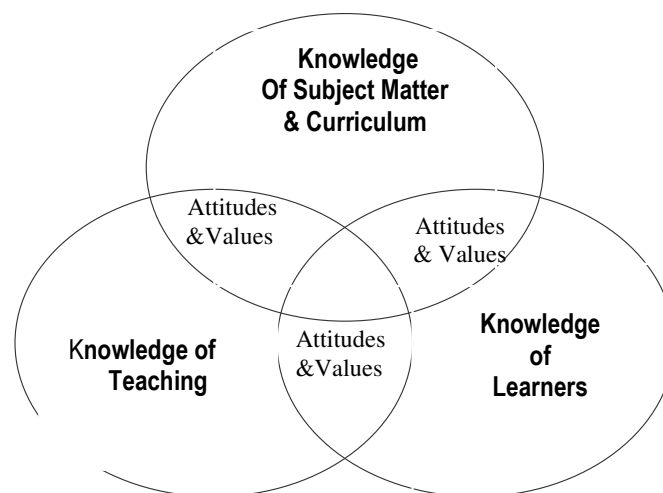
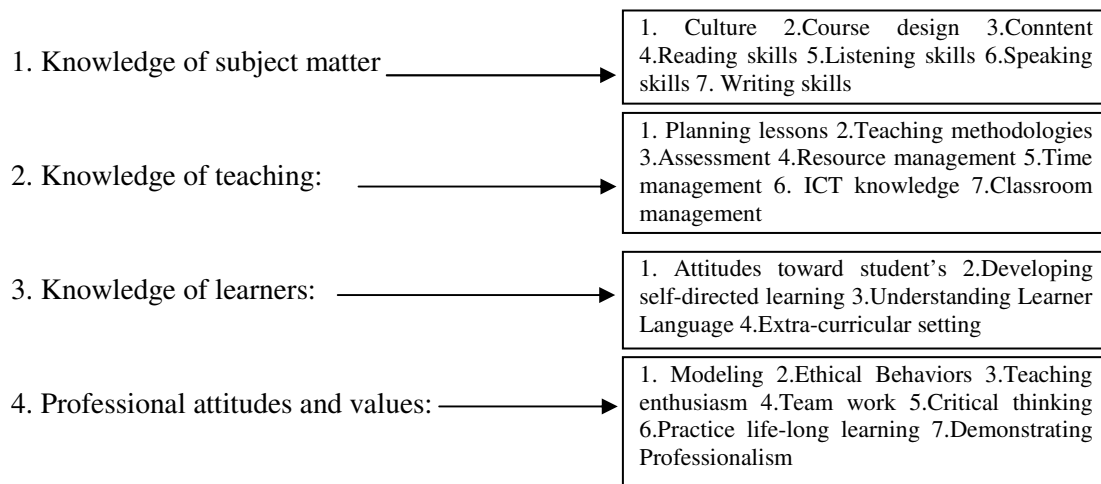


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for Teaching Performance.

Source: Adapted from Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage (2005a) and Ball & Cohen (1999).

#### 4. Results and discussion

##### *Rating the Beginning Teachers' Performance by the Head Teachers*

Twenty-four variables were chosen to rate the beginning teachers' performance based on the frameworks from Bransford, Darling-Hammond and LePage (2005) and Ball and Cohen (1999). In this framework, the complex activities of teaching are divided into 24 components clustered into 4 domains of teaching: knowledge of subject, knowledge of teaching, knowledge of learners and

professional values. Among 24 components, listening skill is rated lowest while the teaching enthusiasm is highest. It could be seen that the head teachers were most dissatisfied with listening skill and most satisfied with teaching enthusiasm. One reason that may explain for the high level of teaching enthusiasm among new teachers is that they normally are still young and eager to work hard to complete their tasks; they feel enthusiastic about entering a new world with youthful energy. When asked the reason for the weakness in listening skill, most teachers stated that the lack of supporting

facilities and a high ratio student per class has made teaching of this skill more difficult.

***How well do beginning English teachers perform their teaching job through the Head English Teachers' satisfaction level?***

Teacher quality is widely recognized as influencing student achievement and success in school (Linda & Paul, 2006). This section discusses the overall satisfaction level of English head teachers with new teachers. In other words, this section examines how new teachers have responded to job requirements by means of head teachers' estimates.

The overall satisfaction level of head teachers with new teachers was rated on average at 3.02. (1= very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied). So the new teachers have met just fifty percent of employers' requirements. They are somewhat satisfied and dissatisfied. According to the interviews with head English teachers, the points of new teachers that have given them satisfaction were the enthusiasm and teamwork attributes. They stated that new teachers have always showed the excitement and joys in teaching and demonstrating positive attitude toward students. Taken together, they have also worked hard to update information so as to make the lessons more interesting. Those points could have been seen as the strong points for young teachers. The head teachers also reported that if young teachers have good induction training and stimulus, they are quick to become qualified. Many studies have established that inexperienced teachers (those with less than three years of experience) are typically less effective than more senior teachers; the benefits of experience appear to level off after about five years (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

Additionally, the head teachers complained about the teaching skills, class management and the teaching of speaking and listening skills of

new teachers. They stated that the causes of those deficiencies are partially because of limited time for professional practice at teacher training colleges and that the number of students per class is too much. That makes teaching of communication skill and class management difficult. Apparently, the young teachers have faced many challenges upon entering the teaching career. As Brock and Grady (1997) concluded, "Teaching is one of the few careers in which the least experienced members face the greatest challenges and most responsibilities. For many new teachers, their first three years are probably the most stressful times in their teaching careers (Martin, Chiodo and Chang, 2001). Working in a new environment, working with an unfamiliar population, and trying to manage a level of confidence at times may seem like an endless task for beginning teachers (Veeman, 1984). Historically, these concerns have tended to be quite universal. Whether you are in the United States or in another country, the challenges are essentially the same (Martin, Chiodo and Chang, 2001). Regardless of the nature of these challenges, beginning teachers tend to have more classroom-related problems than teachers who have been teaching for longer periods of time. That is why new teachers have just met a half of head teachers' expectations. It is so critical for teacher training institutions and schools to provide the necessary resources for the new teachers to become effective and successful in the profession.

***What Is the Difference between Schools Having Different Characteristics in terms of Satisfaction Level with New Teachers?***

This section discusses the differences between schools having different characteristics in terms of employer satisfaction. The findings show that the level of employer satisfaction in non-public schools is higher than public

schools. The difference of satisfaction level between public and non-public is explained by the method of recruitment. The non-public schools have the right of recruiting the teachers by themselves, while the public schools have to recruit them through prefectural boards of education. Since the non-public schools recruit teachers according their demand and needs, they are more satisfied with the new teachers more than the public schools. To compete with other schools and attract the students to maintain their work, the non-public schools have to improve the quality of teaching. Firstly they have to improve the quality of teachers. They have chosen and recruited the qualified teachers according their demand and needs. So, it is understandable that they are more satisfied with the new teachers more than the public schools.

In addition, appraisals of new teachers suggest that private schools are more successful in retaining the best of their new teachers and in developing the teaching skills of their faculties. Apparent reasons include greater flexibility in recruiting, structuring pay, more supervision and mentoring of new teachers, and freedom to dismiss teachers for poor performance. These findings suggest that improvement in the quality of public school performance will require the use of accountability tools such as pay-for-performance and dismissal.

## 5. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to examine how well newly graduated English teachers perform their teaching job based on ratings by head teachers, and to elicit what teacher training colleges and high schools need to do in order to improve the quality of

beginning teachers. This study also aimed to compare the satisfaction level of head teachers with beginning teachers in schools with different characteristics. This may help the policy makers reduce the gap of quality between schools with different characteristics.

Besides, there is a statistically significant difference between non-public and public schools in terms of the overall satisfaction level of head teachers. The satisfaction level of head teachers with beginning teachers in non-public schools is higher than in public schools. The quality of beginning English teachers in non-public schools was more highly appreciated than in public schools.

On the whole, based on the head teachers' opinions, there is a gap, in terms of the quality of beginning English teachers, between schools with different characteristics. Due to the advantages of their independent role in the recruitment of teachers, the non public schools schools have employed better English teachers than the public schools . That is a possible issue for policy-makers to minimize the gap in the quality of teachers between schools and to facilitate the involvement of public schools in the recruitment of teachers.

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## Việc dạy tiếng Anh của giáo viên tiếng Anh mới ra trường

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**Tóm tắt:** Mục tiêu của nghiên cứu này là xem xét việc những giáo viên tiếng Anh mới vào nghề thực hiện công việc của họ như thế nào và điều tra sự khác biệt đối với mức độ hài lòng với những giáo viên tiếng Anh này ở các trường Trung học Phổ thông có những đặc điểm như Trường công lập/Tư. Khuôn khổ phân tích của nghiên cứu này xuất phát từ nghiên cứu của Bransford, Darling-

Hammond & LePage (2005) và Ball & Cohen (1999). Trong khuôn khổ này, những hoạt động giảng dạy được chia thành 24 nhân tố nhóm thành 4 lĩnh vực của giảng dạy: kiến thức của môn; kỹ năng giảng dạy và kiến thức về người học, thái độ và giá trị nghề nghiệp. Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành tại các trường THPT ở Hà Nội và TP HCM. Cỡ mẫu phân tích là 94 hiệu trưởng các trường, được hỏi để đánh giá việc thực hiện giảng dạy của những giáo viên tiếng Anh mới vào nghề trong trường của họ. Kết quả kiểm tra T-test cho thấy mức độ hài lòng của hiệu trưởng với những giáo viên này trong trường Tư thục cao hơn trong trường Công lập. Chất lượng của những giáo viên này trong trường tư thục được đánh giá cao hơn trong trường Công lập.

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