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Developing Early Childhood Educators to Meet Educational Reform Requirements: A Case Study from Vietnam

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Preschool education in Vietnam plays a critical role in fostering the development of children aged 3 months to 6 years. Enhancing teacher quality is essential to achieving educational goals, yet early childhood educators face significant challenges in professional skill development. This study examines the implementation of teacher development activities in the Mekong Delta region.

Materials/methods. A mixed-methods approach was employed, collecting quantitative data from 552 participants (50 administrators and 502 teachers) and qualitative insights through open-ended questions.

Results. Most institutions have structured plans for teacher development, with 81.2% assessing workforce needs and 91.8% establishing clear goals. Training participation is high, with 84.1% engaged in professional title courses and 73.9% in child-centered program development. Teachers favor courses on new programs, STEAM, and life skills education. Performance evaluations were generally positive, though teachers rated themselves higher (M = 4.09) than management (M = 3.36). Facility availability varied, with discrepancies between teacher and management perceptions. Policies remain inadequate, with only 10% finding salary support sufficient, underscoring the need for improved compensation.

Conclusion. Strengthening teacher capacity, refining evaluation methods, and improving salary policies are key to advancing early childhood education. Addressing these areas can drive continuous improvement, transform teaching quality, and enhance educational outcomes in Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Preschool education is the first level in Vietnam's national education system, laying the foundation for the comprehensive development of individuals by nurturing, caring for, and educating children from 3 months to 6 years old. It plays a crucial role in helping children develop cognitively, emotionally, and socially, preparing them for a smooth transition into first grade (Nguyen et al., 2024). Achieving the goals of each educational level requires a consistent focus on improving the quality of the teaching staff through training programs and supportive policies, as teachers are central to determining the effectiveness and quality of education (Do, 2020).

Research on the development of early childhood teachers in Vietnam is particularly significant, given the critical role these educators play in shaping the foundational years of a child's learning and development. In Vietnam's rapid social and economic growth and its increasing alignment with global educational standards, enhancing the quality of early childhood education has become a national priority. Teacher development is crucial to equip early childhood educators with the necessary knowledge, skills, and professional competencies to provide high-quality education and foster children's overall development (Bullock et al., 2015; Manning et al., 2019).

Investing in the professional development of early childhood teachers not only equips them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to provide high-quality educational experiences but also serves as a foundation for fostering lifelong learning in children. By enhancing the expertise of early childhood educators, children benefit from enriched learning environments that promote critical cognitive, emotional, and social growth during their most formative years (Cabell et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2013). Furthermore, well-trained teachers are better prepared to address the diverse needs of children, ensuring that each child receives personalized support that nurtures their individual development (Reyhing & Perren, 2023).

Research in this area plays a pivotal role in shaping educational policies, providing evidence-based insights into the most effective strategies for teacher training and professional development. This helps align Vietnam’s early childhood education system with international best practices, ensuring that the country remains competitive in the global education arena (Adam, 2020; Egert et al., 2018). By implementing these research findings, policymakers can improve teacher training programs, develop more comprehensive evaluation methods, and ensure that early childhood educators continue to advance their professional capacities (Mengstie, 2022; Fackler & Malmberg, 2016).

Focusing on the professional growth of early childhood teachers is essential for advancing Vietnam’s overall education system. As these educators lay the foundation for children's future learning and development, their continuous improvement directly contributes to raising the educational standards across the country. This commitment to teacher development not only fosters a brighter future for the nation’s children but also strengthens Vietnam’s social and economic progress by building a generation of well-prepared, adaptable, and capable individuals (Brown & Feger, 2010; Bullock et al., 2015).

Preschool education in the Mekong Delta provinces in Vietnam has experienced significant positive developments in both quantity and quality. The province has made notable strides in expanding the network of kindergartens, ensuring that more children have access to early childhood education (Nguyen & Thai, 2022). Additionally, preschool institutions have implemented the objectives, curricula, teaching methods, and training approaches with a fair degree of consistency and effectiveness. These improvements have played a crucial role in meeting the growing educational needs of preschool children, supporting their development, and preparing them for primary education (Nguyen et al., 2024).

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However, despite these advancements, several challenges persist, particularly in the areas of teacher training and professional development. Although there has been progress, efforts to enhance the quality of preschool teaching staff remain insufficient to fully meet the demands of modern educational reforms. Teachers often face difficulties in keeping up with the evolving pedagogical methods and practices required to deliver a high-quality learning experience (Coplan et al., 2015). Furthermore, the latest innovations in early childhood education do not always align with the professional development opportunities available to preschool educators, resulting in skills and knowledge gaps that impact teaching effectiveness (Nguyen, 2018).

In addition, the working environment for preschool teachers in the Mekong Delta region has not yet fully met the expectations of current educational innovations. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and the absence of competitive salary and benefits packages contribute to challenges in retaining and motivating qualified teachers. These limitations hinder teachers' ability to perform at their best and engage in continuous professional growth, which is essential for improving the overall quality of preschool education (Nguyen et al., 2024).

A more focused and strategic approach to teacher training and professional development is necessary to address these challenges, ensuring that teachers possess the necessary skills to effectively implement innovative teaching methods (Wolstein et al., 2021). Improving the working conditions and support systems for teachers is equally important to create an environment where educators can thrive and contribute to the development of the province's preschool education system (Santiago et al., 2022). By addressing these limitations, the Mekong Delta provinces can further enhance the quality of their preschool education and ensure that children receive the best possible start in life (Do, 2020).

Therefore, this study will focus on analyzing the current development status of the preschool teaching staff in the Mekong Delta region. This research holds broader implications for education reform in Vietnam, as it not only addresses current challenges faced by early childhood teachers but also provides insights into effective policies and training programs that align with international best practices. Improving the professional competencies of early childhood teachers ensures that they can meet the evolving demands of modern education, contributing to the long-term development of the country's human capital. Furthermore, this study plays a key role in shaping policy decisions that can improve teacher development programs, elevating Vietnam's education system and positioning it to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. The study will address the following research questions:

1. What is the current status of preschool teacher development in the Mekong Delta region?

2. What solutions can be implemented to further develop preschool teachers in the region to meet the demands of the ongoing educational reforms?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Importance of Developing Early Childhood Teachers

Developing early childhood teachers is critical to achieving the goals of educational reform and ensuring young learners receive the support needed for their holistic development. These teachers play a foundational role in fostering children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth, all of which are essential for later academic success and personal development (Adam, 2020). Research shows that well-prepared, competent educators create learning environments that nurture these areas and effectively prepare children for the challenges of formal schooling (Guo et al., 2010).

As Vietnam undergoes rapid social and economic transformation, aligning early childhood education with global standards has become increasingly important (Brown & Feger, 2010). This

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alignment ensures the competitiveness of the education system and addresses the evolving needs of its young population. The success of educational reforms, particularly those targeting early childhood education, largely depends on the quality of teachers who can adapt to new pedagogical approaches. Hu et al. (2021) found a strong link between teachers' self-efficacy, classroom quality, and children's social and academic skills.

Teacher development is essential for the effective implementation of educational reforms. Properly trained teachers are able to deliver high-quality educational experiences that not only support academic learning but also foster emotional and social development (Cabell et al., 2019). These aspects are especially critical during the early years when children undergo their most formative developmental stages. Positive classroom outcomes, such as higher engagement and improved academic performance, are strongly correlated with teacher effectiveness (Falenchuk et al., 2017). Thus, prioritizing teacher development within educational reform is vital for creating an inclusive, supportive, and enriching early childhood learning environment.

Ongoing professional development is also key to sustaining teacher effectiveness. Continuous learning opportunities help teachers stay current with new research, teaching methods, and technologies that can enhance their practices. Lifelong learning equips educators to meet the diverse needs of their students and apply innovative approaches to teaching (Guo et al., 2013; Coplan et al., 2015). Eckhardt and Egert (2018) argue that teachers with access to professional development programs significantly improve the quality of early childhood education by refining their strategies and deepening their understanding of young learners' developmental needs.

Teacher development extends beyond the classroom, benefiting broader societal development. Investing in the growth and improvement of early childhood educators helps build a more resilient, adaptable, and future-ready workforce. Manning et al. (2019) highlight that teacher qualifications and professional competency are strongly associated with the overall quality of early childhood education environments, which in turn influences long-term academic and social outcomes for children. Therefore, robust teacher development is crucial for the success of educational reforms and for fostering the broader development of society.

2.2. Research on Developing Early Childhood Teachers

Research has identified several effective strategies for the professional development of early childhood teachers, which are essential for meeting the demands of educational reform. A widely recommended approach is in-service professional development, including workshops, mentoring, and ongoing training. These programs help educators refine their teaching skills, improve classroom management, and stay informed about the latest pedagogical research (Egert, Fukkink, & Eckhardt, 2018). In-service training enables teachers to continuously adapt to the evolving needs of early childhood education, ensuring they provide high-quality learning experiences for young children (Bullock, Coplan, & Bosacki, 2015).

Another key strategy is fostering a culture of reflective practice and peer collaboration. Reflective practice encourages teachers to critically assess their methods, learn from their experiences, and make necessary adjustments to improve outcomes. Peer collaboration allows educators to share insights, discuss challenges, and develop solutions together, leading to better pedagogical strategies and a deeper understanding of child development (Brown & Feger, 2010; Guo et al., 2010). Hu et al. (2017) note that collaborative reflection helps teachers integrate their beliefs about children into their practice, improving teacher-child interactions and classroom dynamics.

Incorporating technology and modern pedagogical methods into professional development programs is also increasingly important. Studies show that digital tools can enhance teacher effectiveness by offering new ways to engage children in learning (Do, 2020). International

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comparisons suggest that aligning teacher training with global best practices can significantly improve classroom quality and student outcomes. Countries like Finland and Portugal, which focus on the quality of teacher-child interactions, have seen positive developmental outcomes in children's self-regulation and social skills (Salminen et al., 2021). These global examples highlight the importance of adopting international standards in teacher development.

Mentoring is another effective strategy for supporting early childhood teachers. Research shows that mentor-mentee relationships help novice teachers build confidence, improve instructional techniques, and manage classroom challenges. Kupila, Ukkonen-Mikkola, and Rantala (2017) found that teachers who engage in mentorship programs are more likely to implement best practices and adapt to educational reforms. Mentorship not only supports professional growth but also fosters a collaborative learning environment, enhancing overall education quality.

Finally, government policies and institutional support play a crucial role in facilitating professional development. Policies that provide funding for continuous education and incentives for teacher participation are essential for long-term success (Nguyen et al., 2024). Without such support, many early childhood educators, particularly in rural or underserved areas, may lack access to the training and resources needed to meet educational reform demands (Nguyen, 2023). Countries like Germany and Singapore, which prioritize teacher development through well-designed policies, have seen significant improvements in early childhood education quality (Manning et al., 2019; Lim & Torr, 2007).

2.3. Managing Professional Improvement Activities for Preschool Teachers

Managing professional development for preschool teachers in Vietnam faces several challenges despite ongoing efforts to enhance teacher growth. According to Nguyen (2023), there is a significant disparity in the availability and quality of professional development programs across regions. While urban districts have access to established training programs, rural areas often suffer from resource shortages and outdated materials, leading to inconsistencies in teacher development. These disparities hinder teachers' ability to stay current with modern pedagogical practices, resulting in uneven teaching quality nationwide (Nguyen & Thai, 2022).

Recent studies highlight the increasing awareness of the importance of continuous professional development as Vietnam aligns its early childhood education system with global standards. However, the pressure to meet new expectations amidst educational reform is not fully supported by cohesive policies and structured training programs, limiting the successful implementation of reforms (Do, 2020). For example, while the government has introduced policies to improve teacher quality, such as competency frameworks and regular training requirements, the gap between policy goals and actual implementation persists, particularly in under-resourced areas (Nguyen et al., 2024).

In addition to resource constraints, financial investment in professional development remains insufficient. Nguyen (2024) notes that the lack of funding has restricted access to high-quality development opportunities for many preschool teachers. This shortage of investment not only limits training opportunities but also reduces teachers' motivation to engage in continuous professional growth. Without adequate incentives and support, many teachers struggle to prioritize development amid the daily demands of their roles.

Furthermore, Perren et al. (2017) observe that professional improvement activities often focus heavily on theoretical sessions, with limited opportunities for hands-on, practical learning. This disconnect between theory and practice complicates the effectiveness of professional development, as teachers find it difficult to apply new knowledge in their classrooms. Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for more targeted, hands-on training approaches to better support teachers in meeting the demands of modern early childhood education (Hu et al., 2017).

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2.4. Strengths and Limitations of Developing Early Childhood Teachers

Vietnam has made significant strides in developing early childhood teachers, notably through expanding teacher training programs and implementing policy reforms aimed at enhancing classroom quality. The government has launched several initiatives to modernize the curriculum by incorporating international best practices, which has enhanced teachers' pedagogical skills (Nguyen, 2018). These efforts have particularly benefited urban areas, where teachers have better access to professional development resources, leading to improvements in classroom management and instructional methods (Do, 2020). A key strength is the emphasis on competency-based training programs that align with global educational standards, equipping preschool teachers with the skills necessary to support children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Research shows that high-quality teacher training correlates with improved classroom environments and better student outcomes (Manning et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2010). Additionally, these efforts have fostered greater awareness among teachers of the importance of continuous learning and self-efficacy (Hu et al., 2021).

Despite these strengths, there are significant limitations, especially in rural areas. Many preschool teachers in Vietnam face challenges due to inadequate resources and limited access to ongoing professional development. Nguyen et al. (2024) highlight disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of training quality and teacher support. Rural teachers often contend with outdated materials, poor facilities, and a lack of mentorship, which hampers their ability to implement modern teaching practices effectively. Furthermore, Nguyen and Thai (2022) note the uneven implementation of educational reforms, where urban schools with better resources successfully adopt changes, while rural areas struggle due to financial constraints and weak policy enforcement. This inconsistency has created a gap in teacher competency and classroom quality, particularly in remote regions (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Additionally, systemic issues related to teacher support and motivation persist. Limited financial investment in teacher development, along with inadequate salary and incentive structures, often leaves preschool teachers without the necessary motivation to pursue further training or apply new skills (Nguyen, 2023). As a result, job satisfaction and professional growth are lower, particularly in areas with fewer resources. While Vietnam has made notable progress in teacher development, disparities in access to training, coupled with resource limitations, continue to impede the effective implementation of educational reforms.

2.5. The Present Study

This study synthesizes both domestic and international research on teacher development, highlighting valuable insights into various educational sectors, including early childhood education, teacher quality, and professional development strategies. These studies provide a rich source of information and practical guidance for enhancing early childhood teacher development. However, most existing research focuses on teacher development across multiple educational levels, such as primary, secondary, and vocational education, with limited attention given to the specific context of early childhood education. Notably, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the early childhood teaching workforce in the Mekong Delta provinces in Vietnam, especially in the context of ongoing educational reforms. This gap underscores the need for empirical data on the development of early childhood educators in the region. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by providing insights into the current status of preschool teachers in An Giang, evaluating the progress made in recent years, and proposing targeted solutions to align the development of the preschool teaching staff with the demands of current educational reforms. The findings of this research will offer valuable recommendations to improve the quality and effectiveness of early childhood education in the region.

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3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate key activities related to the training, education, and development of preschool teachers. Quantitative data were gathered through structured surveys and analyzed using statistical measures such as percentage distributions, mean values, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha to assess the reliability and consistency of responses. These analyses provide insights into the current status of development plans, training programs, and evaluation methods. Meanwhile, qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with preschool teachers and education administrators offer a deeper understanding of their experiences, expectations, and perspectives on teacher development. The findings from both methods were analyzed separately and then compared to identify patterns and relationships, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Key variables examined include the current state of development plans, training content and courses, teacher expectations for training, and assessment practices from both leadership and teacher perspectives. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study provides a holistic view of the factors influencing preschool teacher development activities.

3.2. Research sample

The study involved a convenience sample of 552 participants, including 50 managers and 502 preschool teachers from six districts and cities in the Mekong Delta provinces of Vietnam. Of the surveyed group, 99.3% were female. The results showed that 71.2% of managers and preschool teachers were under the age of 45. Regarding educational qualifications, 0.9% held a master's degree, 76.4% had a bachelor's scale, and 15.6% held a college diploma. School principals and educational management leaders (Department of Education and Training, District Education Divisions) approved the study and invited preschool teachers and representatives from educational management institutions to participate.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were also assured that the questionnaire guaranteed confidentiality, as it did not require the disclosure of names of individuals or schools. The research team directly collected the responses after each participant completed the questionnaire within 30 minutes. Additionally, the study conducted in-depth interviews with 36 leaders, managers, and 36 teachers from preschool education institutions to further explore the research topics. The interviewees were different from those who participated in the questionnaire survey.

3.3. Research Instrument

The study divides a 70-item assessment scale into 8 factors to evaluate the current state of early childhood teacher development.

Factor one consists of 6 items related to the planning of early childhood teacher development (e.g., "Surveying the current status of the preschool teacher workforce in schools").

Factor two contains 7 items focusing on the evaluation of management staff and preschool teachers' feedback on training and professional development content (e.g., "Subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, and practices").

Factor three includes 13 items covering training and development courses for preschool teachers (e.g., "Training according to professional title standards for preschool teachers").

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Factor four has 13 items addressing professional development content to align with the updated preschool education program (e.g., "Training in program development for schools based on comprehensive, integrated, and child-centered education").

Factor five consists of 10 items concerning professional development courses preferred by preschool teachers (e.g., "Understanding the new preschool education program").

Factor six includes four items related to the evaluation of preschool teachers based on their teaching performance and student outcomes (e.g., "Evaluating preschool teachers through feedback from administrators and parents").

Factor seven consists of 8 items assessing the results of surveys on school facilities as reported by management and teachers (e.g., "Availability of a multimedia room").

Factor eight includes nine items related to policies and benefits for preschool teachers, as assessed by management officials (e.g., "Attractive policies for teachers working in socio-economically disadvantaged or ethnic minority areas").

Additionally, the study developed two sets of interview guidelines for in-depth interviews, tailored to each participant group: one for management staff and one for preschool teachers. Each interview guide contained approximately 15 key open-ended questions aimed at exploring the current status and potential solutions for improving the quality of the preschool teaching workforce, complementing the quantitative findings of the study.

3.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data collected from the survey questionnaires were cleaned, with invalid responses removed, and then entered and analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistical methods such as percentage rates, mean, and standard deviations (SD) were employed to assess the evaluations from teachers, management staff, and parents regarding the quality of preschool teachers. The Likert scale data were converted to a 4-point scale, where 1 represented the lowest score, and 4 represented the highest.

The scale was divided into five equal levels, with the distance between levels calculated as 0.75 using the formula [(max-min)/n]. The resulting levels were as follows: Level 1: 1.0≤ average score < 1.75, Level 2: 1.75≤ average score < 2.50, Level 3: 2.50≤ average score < 3.25, and Level 4: 3.25≤ average score ≤ 4.0. Qualitative data from the in-depth interviews were organized by key issues or research topics and analyzed based on specific criteria and content areas.

4. Results

4.1. Planning for Early Childhood Teacher Development

Survey results revealed that the majority of preschool institutions in the Mekong Delta provinces have a well-structured plan for early childhood teacher development. According to the surveys, 81.2% of schools have conducted assessments of their current preschool teacher workforce, and 81.6% have made projections regarding future teacher needs. Furthermore, 91.8% of schools have established clear development goals and strategies, and 97.5% have set criteria for teacher quality. The in-depth interviews supported these findings, with teachers expressing that continuous plans for teacher development are in place, focusing on professional qualifications and skill enhancement. Interview responses such as "The school has a continuous plan for professional training to enhance qualifications" highlight the ongoing efforts to improve teacher competency.

4.2. Evaluation of Training and Professional Development Content

Management staff and teachers provided feedback on the content of training and professional development. As shown in Table 2, subject matter knowledge was highly rated by both groups, with

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managers rating it 4.84 (SD = 0.37, α = 0.70) and teachers rating it 4.77 (SD = 0.58, α = 0.60). Teaching skills and professional expertise received the highest ratings from managers (M = 4.88, SD = 0.38, α = 0.66). The interviews further indicated that managers often arrange workshops and skill-sharing sessions to improve teaching abilities, reinforcing the survey results. Managers emphasized that these sessions help teachers stay updated on pedagogical trends and enhance classroom practices.

4.3. Training and Development Courses for Preschool Teachers

Regarding training courses, 84.1% of preschool teachers participated in courses aligned with professional title standards, and 80.9% participated in annual regular training. The survey results also revealed that 73.9% of teachers engaged in program development training, which focused on comprehensive, integrated, and child-centered education. Interviews with management officials echoed these findings, highlighting the importance of professional title standard training as a key element in maintaining quality across the board. Managers noted, "Regular professional development courses are necessary to maintain consistency in the education system and ensure all teachers are up to date."

4.4. Professional Development for Updated Preschool Education Program

The survey data revealed that 87.6% of teachers participated in training for school program development based on comprehensive, integrated, and child-centered education. Furthermore, 80.7% of teachers engaged in training that focused on developing and utilizing evaluation tools for the preschool education program. Interviews with teachers confirmed these results, as many noted that training for program development has helped them better integrate modern educational approaches. One teacher mentioned, "Training in child-centered education has allowed us to better tailor our lessons to the individual needs of children."

4.5. Preferred Professional Development Courses

Teachers expressed strong preferences for professional development courses focused on understanding the new preschool education program (over 70%), designing experiential activities, and applying STEAM in preschool teaching. Survey results also indicated a significant demand for courses in life skills education, with over 60% of teachers wanting training in this area. Interviews confirmed this, as teachers expressed their interest in enhancing their understanding of modern teaching methods and in applying innovative approaches like STEAM to better engage students.

4.6. Evaluation of Preschool Teachers Based on Performance

Survey results from both management and teachers revealed that performance evaluations were largely positive. Teachers rated their teaching performance slightly higher than management, with an average score of 3.56 for teaching and educating children compared to management's score of 3.40. Similarly, evaluations based on classroom observations showed teachers rating themselves more favorably (M = 4.09) than management's assessment (M = 3.36). Interviews with management revealed a strong focus on multiple evaluation methods, including classroom observations and feedback from parents, which are key indicators of teacher effectiveness.

4.7. Assessment of School Facilities

Surveys indicated a discrepancy between management staff and teachers regarding the availability of facilities. While 34% of management staff reported the availability of a music and art activity room, 72.1% of teachers indicated that such facilities existed. Only 16% of management staff reported the availability of libraries, while 40.1% of teachers did. Interviews with management officials highlighted the variability in facility quality, with some schools having well-equipped spaces and others needing significant improvements.

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4.8. Policies and Benefits for Preschool Teachers

Survey data revealed that policies and benefits for preschool teachers are still considered limited, especially in terms of salary and allowances. Only 10% of management officials considered salary policies adequate, while 22.1% of teachers rated them as "still limited." Similarly, 52% of management officials and 14.5% of teachers viewed policies for teachers working in socio-economically disadvantaged or ethnic minority areas as insufficient. Interviews supported these findings, as teachers expressed a desire for better compensation and support, particularly in rural areas, with one manager stating, "We try to provide time allowances, but we lack the funds to offer more comprehensive support."

5. Discussion

This study on preschool teacher development in the Mekong Delta provinces of Vietnam reveals both progress and challenges. While it aligns with global research, it also highlights specific issues in the Vietnamese context, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

5.1. Planning for Preschool Teacher Development

The majority of schools in the region have established development plans, with 81.2% assessing their teacher workforce and 91.8% setting development goals. These plans align with Abu Taleb's (2012) research on structured teacher development. However, rural schools face resource shortages, teacher shortages, and limited access to continuous training, which hampers implementation. Despite comprehensive plans, only 81.6% forecast future teacher needs, indicating potential challenges with population growth or policy changes. The uneven distribution of resources between urban and rural areas also exacerbates disparities in educational quality. Effective implementation depends on external factors like funding and policy support, as emphasized by Do (2020).

5.2. Evaluation of Training and Professional Development Content

Both management and teachers rated training content on subject knowledge, teaching skills, and professional expertise positively. However, discrepancies emerged in ratings for scientific research methods and computer skills, with teachers rating themselves higher than management. This could indicate differing expectations or a gap in the alignment of training content. Similar findings in international research, such as by Brown and Feger (2010), suggest a need for better communication between management and teachers. The lower ratings for research skills by management could reflect a prioritization of practical teaching skills over research methods in resource-constrained settings, as noted by Hu et al. (2017). Addressing these disparities requires more dialogue and feedback to ensure training meets the needs of both teachers and administrators.

5.3. Training and Development Courses for Preschool Teachers

The high participation rates in general professional development courses (84.1%) and annual training (80.9%) show preschool teachers are committed to continuous development, particularly in meeting national standards. These courses help ensure teachers remain aligned with core competencies, as noted by Mengstie (2022). However, lower participation in specialized training, such as school counseling (15.1%) and foreign language training (38.9%), highlights gaps in critical skill areas.

As preschool classrooms evolve to include children with diverse needs, specialized training in counseling and language proficiency is becoming more important. Low participation in these areas may be due to limited resources or insufficient emphasis on their value. Research by Coplan et al. (2015) underscores the importance of emotional regulation skills, while Lim and Torr (2007) highlight the growing relevance of multilingualism in early education. Increasing focus on specialized training could improve preschool education, especially as it prepares students for a globalized world.

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Moreover, barriers to specialized training include limited funding and time allowances for teachers, which impacts participation in these essential courses, as confirmed by Egert et al. (2018).

5.4. Professional development for an updated preschool education program

The high participation rate (87.6%) in training for child-centered, integrated education reflects preschool teachers' strong commitment to modern pedagogical practices. This aligns with global trends recognizing the importance of child-centered education for holistic child development. Training in these approaches enables teachers to create more engaging and responsive learning environments, contributing to better educational outcomes, especially as Vietnam reforms its early childhood education system.

However, challenges remain in fully implementing these practices. Despite the high participation, rural areas face barriers such as limited resources, inadequate training, and logistical challenges that hinder the application of child-centered approaches. Teachers in urban areas often have better access to support, while those in rural regions struggle with outdated facilities and minimal professional development. Additionally, while training enhances teacher effectiveness, ongoing support from educational leadership is necessary for sustained success. In An Giang, financial constraints and administrative difficulties affect the continuity of teacher training. Moreover, as educational standards and methodologies evolve, professional development programs must continually adapt to remain relevant and effective.

5.5. Preferred Professional Development Courses

In this region, over 70% of preschool teachers expressed a strong demand for professional development in experiential activities, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics), and life skills education. This reflects a proactive approach to integrating modern educational methods that prepare students for a rapidly evolving world. The interest in STEAM highlights a growing recognition of the importance of interdisciplinary learning to foster creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills in young learners.

Additionally, there is a clear shift toward more student-centered, inquiry-based learning, as seen in the high demand for experiential activities. These hands-on approaches promote deeper understanding and engagement, aligning with child-centered educational philosophies. Teachers also recognize the importance of life skills education—communication, teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving—as essential for holistic child development.

However, despite this eagerness, challenges remain, particularly in rural areas like An Giang. Limited access to resources and training opportunities hinders the full integration of these methods. This gap underscores the need for targeted efforts to provide all teachers with access to professional development, ensuring they can effectively deliver curricula that meet the demands of a technology-driven, interconnected world.

5.6. Evaluation of preschool teachers based on performance

The performance evaluations of preschool teachers revealed a common discrepancy: teachers tended to rate their teaching and classroom management skills higher than management staff. This gap between self-assessment and administrative evaluations suggests the need for a more transparent and collaborative evaluation process. Teachers may base their positive self-assessments on immediate classroom outcomes, while administrators focus on long-term goals and educational standards, which can lead to differing perspectives on performance (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Addressing this misalignment requires clearer evaluation frameworks and improved communication between teachers and administrators. Research suggests that involving teachers in the evaluation process through self-reflection and open discussions can foster mutual understanding

and enhance transparency (Bullock et al., 2015). Additionally, a strong sense of self-efficacy among teachers can be beneficial for their motivation and job satisfaction, but only if it aligns with constructive feedback from management (Guo et al., 2013).

To bridge the gap, comprehensive evaluation systems incorporating peer assessments, student feedback, and classroom observations should be implemented. Professional development opportunities aligned with evaluation criteria can also help teachers improve areas of weakness, such as curriculum development or new teaching methods, and close the gap between self-perceptions and administrative expectations. Regular, constructive feedback is crucial to supporting ongoing teacher growth and improving evaluation accuracy.

5.7. Assessment of School Facilities

The survey revealed a significant discrepancy between management staff and teachers regarding the availability of school facilities, such as libraries and activity rooms. Management staff reported fewer resources compared to teachers, suggesting differences in awareness or access. This aligns with global studies, such as Denny et al. (2012), showing similar inconsistencies in resource availability, especially in low-income or rural preschools. In An Giang, rural areas face severe shortages of essential facilities, which limits teachers' ability to implement modern, child-centered teaching methods and impacts students' overall development.

Interviews further emphasized the importance of adequate infrastructure for quality education. Teachers and management staff noted deteriorating facilities and financial constraints, particularly in rural schools. The lack of specialized spaces, such as art or music rooms, restricts creative and diverse learning experiences, which are vital for early childhood development (Hu et al., 2021). The absence of proper facilities also contributes to increased teacher stress and burnout, as they must compensate by creating their own materials or finding alternative spaces.

Addressing these disparities requires investment in upgrading and maintaining school infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Targeted funding and partnerships with community organizations or private donors could help bridge the resource gap, providing schools with essential facilities and improving educational outcomes for all children, regardless of location.

5.8. Policies and benefits for preschool teachers

The study highlights the inadequacy of policies and benefits for preschool teachers, particularly in terms of salary and professional allowances. These challenges are consistent with global research (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016) linking low compensation to reduced teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and retention. Insufficient pay and demanding responsibilities often lead to high turnover and lower commitment, particularly in early childhood education.

Teachers in disadvantaged and ethnic minority areas face even greater hurdles, including limited funding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of professional development opportunities. As noted by Nguyen and Thai (2022), these conditions deter qualified educators and undermine educational quality in marginalized regions. Similarly, the absence of financial support for professional growth hinders teachers' ability to improve their skills and meet evolving demands.

The disparity in policy attention between preschool and higher-level educators further exacerbates these issues (Do, 2020). Teachers in ethnic minority areas face unique challenges, such as language barriers and cultural differences, yet current policies fail to address these specific needs (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Addressing these gaps is essential. Improving salary structures, offering financial support for professional development, and introducing targeted policies for disadvantaged areas are key steps to enhancing teacher motivation and stability. As Ulferts, Wolf, and Anders (2019) suggest,

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strengthening teacher support systems benefits not only educators but also the students they serve, improving outcomes across early childhood education.

6. Conclusion

Developing a high-quality preschool teaching workforce is essential to achieving educational reforms and supporting Vietnam's national development goals. A strategic plan for teacher development, grounded in professional standards, is critical for addressing current needs and fostering long-term growth. Effective planning requires clear objectives, resource allocation, and coordination across management levels to ensure system-wide consistency and efficiency.

7. Suggestion

Comprehensive training programs that focus on modern teaching techniques, continuous feedback, and practical alignment are vital. Incentives, such as financial support and flexible scheduling, can motivate teachers to actively participate in professional development, improving both teaching quality and educational outcomes.

Evaluation frameworks based on professional standards provide a fair and transparent mechanism for assessing teaching effectiveness. Regular assessments, combined with access to resources and workshops, support teacher growth and align with institutional goals for innovation.

Supportive policies that include equitable compensation, external funding, and professional growth incentives are crucial for fostering teacher motivation and long-term commitment. Initiatives like competency-based evaluation frameworks and targeted development projects can strengthen the workforce and align teacher development with national goals.

This study acknowledges limitations, including time and funding constraints, which may limit the generalizability of findings. Future research should expand across diverse regions to provide a comprehensive understanding of workforce development and address socio-economic disparities.

By implementing these strategies, stakeholders can create a supportive environment for teachers, ensuring a highly skilled workforce capable of meeting the evolving demands of early education and contributing to Vietnam's broader economic and societal development.

8. Limitations

Due to limitations in time and budget, the study has not explored the development of preschool teachers on a broader scale. Additionally, the research has primarily focused on specific aspects of preschool teacher development, while other factors, such as the influence of local culture or educational policies in different regions, have not been comprehensively analyzed. Therefore, future studies should expand the scope of the investigation, explore additional influencing factors, and analyze them within the context of educational policies in each region to enhance the comprehensiveness of assessing the needs and solutions for preschool teacher development.

Declarations

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Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
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