INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW

MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 5 | Issue 5

2022

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Enhancing Foreign Language Teachers' Professional Competency in the Education Era 4.0

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ABSTRACT

In the context of education 4.0, foreign language teachers face many challenges. They have to actively adjust their role in language transmission and take on the responsibilities of new-age foreign language teachers. The article examines the effect of several factors on the improvement of professional competence of foreign language teachers. Research results contribute to the fulfilment of Thai Nguyen University of Education's annual training for high school teachers. Research methods include collecting data by surveying, interviewing high school teachers, synthesizing, and processing data using SPSS software. Following that, a number of recommendations are proposed to contribute to the achievement of the educational reform goal of the country.

Keywords: *factors, influence, professional competence, fostering.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is reforming numerous sectors of the economy, politics, society, and education, among others, in response to the globalization trend. To adapt to the education industry's innovation, each teacher must not only adapt to the country's changing circumstances, focusing on the new standards, rules, and requirements of society but also self-develop, change his behaviour, thinking and regularly update their knowledge. Providing opportunities for schoolteachers to enhance their professional competence has become a critical responsibility for higher education.

It is frequently required to identify issues impacting the professional competence of pedagogical teachers in general and foreign language teachers in particular, itoenhance their competence. A thorough awareness of the factors affecting career competence enables managers to determine the most efficient strategies and methods for assisting those teachers in developing their professional competence. That is why we choose the title of this paper "**Enhancing foreign language teachers' professional competence in the 4.0 era of education**".

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(A) Research purposes

Identifying and evaluating factors affecting the professional competence of foreign language teachers in high schools throughout northern Vietnam. From there, recommendations for implementing annual teacher training at the Thai Nguyen University of Education should be established.

(B) Research Methods

We employ the following research methods to address the issues: analyzing and applying scholars' philosophical, educational, and psychological theories; observing; conducting interviews and surveys using questionnaires; processing statistics data using SPSS software.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS

(A) The concept of competence

There are numerous definitions of competence. According to Bernd Meier and Nguyen Van Cuong (2018), "Competence is the capacity to perform tasks successfully and responsibly, solve problems in defined and changing situations, on the basis of a broad mobilization of knowledge, skills, and other psychological attributes such as motivation, will, conception, values..., thorough thinking, and willingness to act" [1]. According to Pham Thi Minh Hanh (2007), "Competence is a collection of human attributes or qualities that function as an internal condition, establishing ideal conditions for the successful performance of a particular sort of action or movement" [2]. From the foregoing definitions, competence can be defined as the sum of an individual's skill, attitude, experience, psychological, physiological, intellectual characteristics that enable him or her to do a specific activity completely, with integrity, and quality.

(B) Professional competence of foreign language teachers

As a result of the above-mentioned concepts, the professional competence of teachers, including foreign language teachers, can be defined as the sum of a teacher's mental, physiological qualities, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences that enable them to fulfill their duties of teaching and educating students in educational institutions. In other words, the professional competence of teachers is their psychological and physiological qualities that are consistent with the requirements of the teaching profession.

However, due to the specificity of the subject, to enhance the professional competence of English teachers to meet the requirements of improving the quality of English teaching and learning under the Project on teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education

system for the period of 2017 - 2025, the Ministry of Education and Training has developed a document defining the basic requirements for the competence of general English teachers in 5 areas, each area of which includes criteria of knowledge and skills to be achieved for high school teachers [4]. Foreign language teachers' professional competence has been developed over time as they study at universities of education. It is the ability to use knowledge of foreign languages (English), culture, pedagogy, psychology, teaching methods to design and implement teaching and learning activities in schools; apply skills in dealing with pedagogical situations, scientific research skills to develop their professional qualifications... After graduation from universities, every teacher's professional competence must be enhanced regularly in order to fulfill the demands of their work.

III. RESEARCH MODEL

Based on this foundation, we establish a quality scale system, which consists of six factors (independent variables): Position of the profession in society; Organizing the learning process; Attitude toward the profession; Expertise; Job skills; Occupational experience, and 01 dependent variable is Professional competence (Figure 1). The research hypothesis is that 6 factors in the scale have a positive impact on Professional competency (PC).
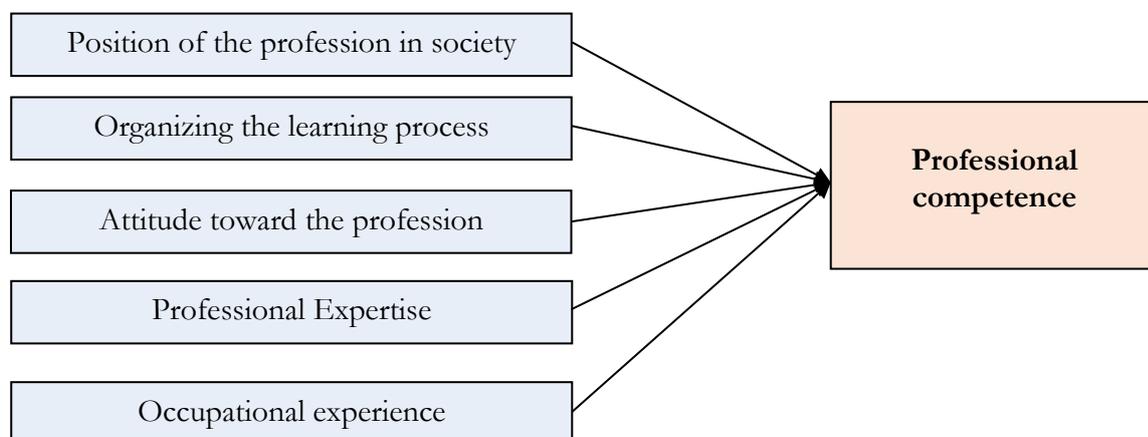
Figure 1. Research model

The research was conducted qualitatively and quantitatively through the collecting of survey data. The authors conducted interviews with 5 English lecturers from the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the Thai Nguyen University of Education. Simultaneously, the authors conducted a direct discussion in the form of open-ended questions with 20 teachers who have been teaching foreign languages at high schools. Through studying the opinions of these lecturers and teachers, the research team proposed 06 factors (independent variables) with 28 observed variables and 01 dependent variables with 5 observed variables shown in Table 1 to ascertain

the factors affecting the professional competence of high school foreign language teachers.

Table 1. Scale system of factors affecting professional competence of foreign language teachers

No	Factor Group	Symbol
I	**Position of the Profession in society**	**PP**
1	Society's assessment of the teaching profession	PP1
2	Work environment	PP2
3	Teachers' living conditions (salaries, incentives, etc.)	PP3
4	Opportunity to continue studying and doing scientific research	PP4
II	**Organizing the Learning Process**	**LP**
5	Training time	LP1
6	Technical facilities to support teaching and learning	LP2
7	Incentives during training (tuition fees, rewards, scholarships, ...)	LP3
8	Professional practice	LP4
9	Pedagogical internship	LP5
III	**Attitude toward the Profession**	**AP**
10	Personal personality	AP1
11	Knowledge of teaching profession	AP2
12	Self-expectations	AP3
13	Consciousness to cultivate professional skills	AP4
14	Passion for the job	AP5
IV	**Professional Expertise**	**PE**
15	Language knowledge (English)	PE1
16	Knowledge of the culture, society, and country of the language being	PE2

	studied	
17	Knowledge of education, psychology	PE3
18	Knowledge of information technology	PE4
V	**Professional Skills**	**PS**
19	Methods of teaching foreign languages	PS1
20	Skills in handling pedagogical situations	PS2
21	Self-study and teamwork skills	PS3
22	Other soft skills (patience, flexibility...)	PS4
23	Pedagogical behavior	PS5
VI	**Occupational Experience**	**OE**
24	Working time (seniority)	OE1
25	Regular professional training	OE2
26	Participating in training-workshops	OE3
27	Participating in contests	OE4
28	Professional activities (class observation, professional meeting...)	OE5
VII	**Professional competency**	**PC**
1	Competence suitable for the job	PC1
2	Creative thinking at work	PC2
3	Mastering the job	PC3
4	Organizing and managing the work	PC4
5	Communicating and leading work	PC5

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

The five-level Likert scale: (1) Completely disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Moderately agree, (4) Agree, and (5) Completely agree was used to quantify the observed variables' values. The

survey was conducted with the participation of foreign language teachers from high schools and middle schools in northern Vietnam (Table 2). After processing, 150 data samples with appropriate information for research were obtained. The data were analyzed using the SPSS-27 program.

Table 2. General information about participants in the survey

Participants	Number	%
1. Teachers from the province		
Bac Kan	25	16.6
Bac Giang	49	32.7
Son La	43	28.7
Lao Cai	33	22.0
Total	**150**	**100.0**
2. Gender		
Male	40	26.7
Female	110	73.3
Total	**150**	**100.0**

(A) The results of evaluation and testing of the reliability of the scale by Cronbach's Alpha

According to the research model, the scale of factors affecting the professional competence of English language teachers at schools in 4 provinces was determined. Six factors (independent variable) and 01 dependent variable were measured and analyzed by Cronbach's Alpha. The results of analysis on 33 observed variables show that all scales of the factors have Cronbach Alpha coefficient ≥ 0.6 (Table 3). Thus, the scale system that is built with 6 scales ensures good quality with 33 characteristic variables. As a result, the information collected from the survey sample can be used with confidence for further EFA analysis.

Table 3. Summary of results of scale quality analysis

by Cronbach's alpha coefficient

N₀	Scale	Numbers of observed variables	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Position of the Profession in society	4	.682
2	Organizing the Learning Process	5	.753
3	Attitude toward the Profession	5	.686
4	Professional Expertise	4	.815
5	Professional Skills	5	.632
6	Occupational Experience	5	.718
7	Professional Competence	5	.876

(B) Exploratory Factor Analysis

1. Factor analysis- Scale of factors affecting professional competence

The EFA analysis includes 28 observed factors from six independent variables affecting professional competence of English teachers. The results of EFA analysis in Table 4 show that the value is $0.5 \leq KMO = 0.768 \leq 1$, so the factor analysis is appropriate with the research data. Barlett's test result is 2609.853 with a Sig value. $= 0.000 < 0.05$, so the hypothesis H0: observed variables have no correlation with each other in the population is rejected, that is, the variables are correlated with each other and satisfy the conditions of factor analysis.

By the method of factor extraction (principal component) and the method of factor rotation (Varimax), we could extract 8 factors from 28 observed variables that meet the requirements of loading factor > 0.50 and cumulative extraction variance of 76.079% (satisfactory >50%), that is, these 8 factors explain 76.079% of the variation of the data and correspond to Initial Eigenvalues from 1,115 to 6,268 (satisfactory >1).

Table 4. Results of factor analysis- Scale of factors affecting professional competence of English teachers

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.768
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2609.853
	df	325
	Sig.	.000

Rotated Component Matrixᵃ

Variable	Factor Loading							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
LP4	.843							
LP2	.822							
LP3	.811							
PS5	.752							
LP1	.698							
OE5		.814						
PE2		.766						
PE1		.744						
OE4		.736						
PE3		.678						
PE4		.587						
AP3			.819					
LP5			.798					
AP1			.773					

AP2			.761				
OE2				.798			
OE1				.754			
OE3				.747			
PS1					.911		
PP1					.909		
PS4						.931	
PP4						.925	
PS3							.931
PP3							.897
PS2							.942
PP2							.899

From the calculation results, there are groups of factors affecting professional competence of English teachers in high schools in 4 provinces, namely Position of the Profession in society (including 4 variables); Organizing the Learning Process (including 5 variables); Attitude towards the Profession (including 3 variables); Professional Expertise (4 variables); Professional Skills (5 variables) and Professional Competence (5 variables).

2. Factor analysis- Scale "Professional competence"

KMO and Bartlett's test show that sig. = 0.000 (sig. < 0.05, significance level 5%) and $0.5 \leq$ KMO = $0.856 \leq 1$. This result indicates that the observed variables in the population are correlated with each other, and factor analysis (EFA) is appropriate. The method of factor extraction (principal component) and the method of factor rotation (Varimax) allows us to extract a factor from 5 observed variables that meet the requirements of loading factor > 0.50 and cumulative extraction variance of 68.571% (satisfactory >50%), that is, this factor explains 68.571% of the variation of the data, corresponding to Eigenvalues of 3.429 (satisfactory >1).

Table 5. Result of factor analysis- Scale "Professional Competence"

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.856
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	413.351
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.429	68.571	68.571	3.429	68.571	68.571
2	.592	11.840	80.411			
3	.490	9.802	90.213			
4	.250	5.009	95.222			
5	.239	4.778	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

In short, after assessing the scale's reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and its values using EFA, the scale's 28 observed variables (independent variable) belonging to six factors affecting professional competence and five variables (dependent variable) assessing professional competence are all suitable and satisfactory. As a result, all of the variables listed previously were retained for the multivariable linear regression analysis.

(C) Multivariate linear regression analysis

Multiple linear regression is used to determine the concordance between independent variables (factors) and the dependent variable. This outcome will demonstrate the relationship between

the factors impacting English teachers' professional competence in the stud areas. Testing the impact of many quantitative independent variables on one quantitatively dependent variable is carried out according to the research model:

$Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + b_6X_6$

In which:

Y: Professional Competence

X1: Position of the Profession in society

X2: Organizing the Learning Process

X3: Attitude towards the Profession

X4: Professional Expertise

X5: Professional Skills

X6: Occupational Experience

In Table 6, adjusted R Square = .932 > 50% shows that the independent variables affect 93.2% of the change of the dependent variable. Thus, 93.2% of the change in the professional competence of foreign language teachers is explained by the independent variables of the model. Durbin-Watson (d) test shows the result d=1,841 (1<d<3) so we can conclude that the residuals are independent of each other or there is no correlation between the residuals. The results of the analysis of variance show that the test value F = 508.249, with the significance level Sig = 0.00 < 0.05, proves that the multiple regression model is suitable for the data set and ensures reliability.

Table 6. Model Summary and ANOVA

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.966[a]	.933	.932	.16773	1.841

ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

1	Regression	57.196	4	14.299	508.249	.000[b]
	Residual	4.079	145	.028		
	Total	61.275	149			

In Table 7, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) reached the largest value of 1.769 < 2, showing that these independent variables are not closely related, so there is no multi-addition phenomenon. Therefore, the relationship between the independent variables does not significantly affect the explanatory results of the regression model.

Through the above test results, it shows that the assumptions of the multiple linear regression function are not violated and the built regression model is consistent with the population.

Table 7. Statistical analysis of regression coefficients

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.239	.121		-1.983	.049		
	AP	.068	.026	.061	2.623	.010	.837	1.195
	PE	.756	.026	.816	28.629	.000	.565	1.769
	PS	.046	.020	.053	2.314	.022	.872	1.146
	OE	.185	.029	.180	6.365	.000	.574	1.743

The regression coefficients table (Table 7) indicates that the four independent variables, AP, PE, PS, and OE, all show positive and statistically significant regression coefficients (Sig.<0.05). It may be inferred that the four independent variables AP, PE, PS, and OE all have a positive effect on the dependent variable Professional Competence (PC) and that the model fits the sample data. In other words, the independent variables AP, PE, PS, and OE are linearly connected to the dependent variable (PC).

Research results show that the professional competence of English teachers depends on the most on professional expertise (β_2=0.816); The second is the occupational experience (β_2=0.180);

The third is the teacher's attitude towards the profession (β_2=0.053), and the last is the professional skills (β_2=0.053).

V. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings of the investigation of factors affecting the professional competence of foreign language teachers in general, some resolutions can be proposed as follows:

- For foreign language teachers in schools:

The research findings reveal that professional expertise has the most significant influence on the professional competence of foreign language teachers at schools. During their apprenticeship at universities of education, they are provided with knowledge of the language (English), country studies, the culture and society of England, and other English-speaking nations; other subjects such as psychology, education, and complementary knowledge such as scientific research, information technology, etc. They are equipped with theories of teaching methods, necessary skills for teaching such as problem-solving skills, self-research skills...[6]. However, this is insufficient. To meet educational requirements in the modern era, foreign language teachers must be standardized in terms of professional qualifications. Concerning the factors that impede learners' awareness and development of professional competence, the author Khukhlaeva O.V. (2002) argued that doubts about one's professional competence, abilities, skills, and knowledge, as well as unrealistic expectations for professional accomplishments or the salary they are entitled to, all contribute to employees' lack of recognition, improvement of knowledge and professional capacity [7]. That is, teachers must have a thorough understanding of the profession they are practicing, its difficulties and challenges, in order to develop the proper attitude toward the profession, a sense of self-improvement, and a willingness to participate in activities that will help them improve their professional competency.

- For managers at all levels

To ensure that teachers meet the new regulations' standards of training and professional competence, state management agencies should soon develop and complete guiding documents outlining a roadmap for raising the trained standard qualifications of teachers at all levels in high schools. Also, professional development courses for teachers must be organized on a regular basis. Teachers must be facilitated in their participation in seminars and professional training. This will assist teachers in updating and acquiring the latest knowledge and information.

- For universities of education:

To meet the requirements of general education reform and international integration, universities of education must adapt their annual teacher training programs and plans to align with the educational activities included in the new general education program announced by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training [5].

Additionally, universities of education must focus on developing professional competence for pedagogical students beginning with their first year of study: assisting them in a clear understanding of the teaching profession, a passion for their work, a sense of self-improvement, and actively equipping themselves with professional expertise and skills...

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to develop and evaluate a model illustrating the relationship between factors impacting foreign language teachers' professional competency in many northern provinces of Vietnam. It serves as a foundation for proposing several solutions aimed at enhancing the professional competence of foreign language instructors in high schools. It helps increase the efficacy of educational activities, satisfying the country's education reform requirements.

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