

In-House Professional Development (PD) Programs and Its Influences on the Teaching Competence of Teachers at Bilingual International School in Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract

The goal of the study is to understand the internal professional development programs at the school where the researcher is affiliated. From this, the research wants to know the influence of these programs on the teaching competence of the educators at Bilingual International School in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study employs descriptive correlational research design, in which the focus is to look at how in-house professional development (PD) programs affect the teaching skills of bilingual international school (BIS) teachers in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). The respondents for this study are drawn from the teaching staff at a bilingual school in Ho Chi Minh City. Participation in the research has been voluntary, with teachers expressing a willingness to engage in surveys, interviews, and potential classroom observations, forming the core of the participant pool. A

stratified random sample method is used in this research. The findings indicated that the in-house professional development programs at Bilingual International School were predominantly effective in meeting the practical and instructional requirements of teachers. The prevalence of seminars, mentoring, and lesson study sessions demonstrated the school's robust dedication to improving teaching efficacy, fostering collaboration, and embracing technology advancements. The proposed Enhanced In-House Professional Development Program (E-IHPD) strategically addresses the recognized needs of instructors. Based on facts and contemporary educational philosophy, it guarantees that professional development is reflective, innovative, collaborative, and leadership-oriented.

Keywords: *In-House Professional Development Programs, Teaching Competence, Bilingual Schools, International Schools, Descriptive Correlational*

INTRODUCTION

The domain of teacher professional development (PD) is experiencing substantial transformations and increasing complexity globally. Educators are now anticipated to be perpetual learners, consistently refining their skills and knowledge to address the continuously changing requirements of their pupils

(OECD, 2016). Moreover, they encounter escalating pressure to exhibit accountability for their kids' academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

In light of these issues, internal professional development programs are increasingly gaining prominence. These programs aim to furnish educators with customized training and assistance to improve their instructional methods and elevate student performance (Guskey, 2023). In-house professional development programs can be more successful than conventional one-size-fits-all methods, as they can be tailored to the distinct needs of each school and its educators (Fullan, 2019).

Vietnam acknowledges the significance of professional development for educators and has instituted many measures to advance it. These measures encompass the creation of the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) and the provision of financial resources for professional development programs (Nguyen, 2017).

The main ideas behind this study are based on two important educational theories that help us fully understand how well in-house professional development (PD) programs for teachers at bilingual international schools (BIS) in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) work.

First and foremost, the Reflective Practice Theory by Donald Schön (1983) posits that teachers can enhance their professional competence through continuous reflection on their experiences. This theory suggests that by critically examining their teaching practices, educators can identify areas for improvement and refine their instructional strategies. In the study, Schön's theory of reflective practice provides a framework for teachers to critically assess their teaching methods and adapt them to the bilingual international school environment in HCMC.

The second theory is derived from Michael Fullan (2019), the Focused Professional Development Theory that advocates for PD programs tailored to the specific needs of educators and schools, rather than adopting generic, one-size-fits-all approaches. This theory emphasizes the importance of customized strategies in professional development, aligning with the diverse needs and contexts of BIS teachers in HCMC. Fullan says that customized professional development programs can help teachers in bilingual international schools strengthen their skills and help their students do better by focusing on the specific problems and needs of these teachers.

In the context of this study, Fullan's theory guides the evaluation of the effectiveness of in-house PD programs for teachers at BIS in HCMC. The study aims to find out how customized professional development programs can improve teachers' abilities in bilingual international schools by using Fullan's theory as a framework.

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Specifically, it answered the sub-questions:

1. What types of in-house PD opportunities are provided to educators at Bilingual International School in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam?
2. What is the extent of in-house professional development (PD) programs implemented at a bilingual school in Ho Chi Minh City in terms of:

2.1 Integration of Innovative Teaching Methods;

2.2 Adaptability to Diverse Learning Needs;

2.3 Effective Classroom Management;

2.4 Student Engagement; and

2.5 Application of Reflective Practices?

3. What is the level of influence on the competence of teachers at a bilingual school in Ho Chi Minh City in terms of:

3.1 Linguistic Competence;

3.2 Pedagogical Competence;

3.3 Cultural Competence;

3.4 Social Competence; and

3.5 Professional Competence?

4. Is there a significant correlation between the implementation of in-house professional development (PD) programs and the level of influence on teacher competence at a bilingual school in Ho Chi Minh City?

5. What proposed Enhanced In-House Professional Development Programs can be devised to alleviate teachers' needs?

This study focuses on evaluating the efficacy of in-house professional development (PD) programs for teachers at bilingual international schools (BIS) in Ho Chi Minh City throughout the academic year 2024-2025. The research centers on understanding the impact of these programs on teacher competence levels, with respondents comprising actively participating teachers during the specified academic year. However, the study is limited to the specific context of BIS in Ho Chi Minh City, and its findings may not be entirely generalizable to other educational settings. The research scope is constrained to the academic year 2025-2026, limiting the assessment of the PD program's sustained impact over time. The reliance on self-report measures introduces potential response bias, and external factors beyond the study's scope may also contribute to teacher development. The assessment of teacher competence will be based on indicators such as the integration of innovative teaching methods, adaptability to diverse learning needs, effective classroom management, student engagement, and the application of reflective practices.

Literature Review

In-house PD programs offer a wide range of opportunities for educators to enhance their knowledge and skills (DuFour et al., 2018). These opportunities can be broadly categorized into two main types: content-focused and process-focused (Marzano et al., 2018).

Content-focused PD programs provide educators with in-depth knowledge and skills in specific subject areas or pedagogical approaches (Joyce et al., 2018). These programs may focus on curriculum updates, subject-specific methodologies, or emerging pedagogical trends (Lieberman & Miller, 2018). By

participating in content-focused PD programs, educators can stay current in their fields and gain the expertise they need to effectively deliver instruction and support student learning.

The effectiveness of in-house PD programs in enhancing teacher competence and student outcomes has been extensively explored in the literature. A meta-analysis by Guskey (2023) found that in-house PD programs had a positive and significant effect on teacher competence, with an average effect size of 0.32. This finding suggests that in-house PD programs can be a valuable tool for improving teaching and learning.

Fullan (2019) further investigated the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of in-house PD programs. He found that programs that were tailored to the specific needs of the school and its teachers, were collaborative, and provided opportunities for ongoing support and follow-up were most effective. These findings highlight the importance of designing in-house PD programs that are context-specific, supportive, and focused on continuous improvement.

More recent research has further reinforced the effectiveness of in-house PD programs. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) conducted a study that revealed that in-house PD programs that focused on improving teachers' knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy were particularly effective in enhancing student learning outcomes. This finding suggests that in-house PD programs can play a crucial role in strengthening teachers' content and pedagogical expertise, which in turn can lead to improved student learning.

Educators must exhibit exceptional ability in both languages to facilitate successful and precise communication in the classroom. Almetov et al. (2017) mentioned in their study that the aim of this research is to examine the substance, structure, and methods of developing professional teaching competency within the context of multilingual education in schools serving smaller ethnic groups. The professional preparedness of educators for multilingual instruction has been examined through the lens of a competence-based approach. The research has identified fundamental competencies of a teacher for the instruction of school topics in the second language, namely the state or other official language. The directions, forms, and techniques for developing professional teaching competency in the context of multilingual education have been elucidated. The methodology for assessing professional teaching competency in the researched aspect has been scrutinized, and the findings from the monitoring research have been reviewed and synthesized. Suggestions for enhancing professional teaching ability in the realm of multilingual education have been proposed.

The study by Brahm and Scherzinger (2023) captured another aspect of linguistic competence. The ongoing processes of globalization necessitate the enhancement of pupils' international competencies and linguistic abilities. Concurrently, educators encounter a growing diversity of students' primary languages and cultures in classrooms, necessitating adaptive and inclusive strategies that cater to all learners. Bilingual education is one potential approach to address these issues; yet, it necessitates a significant degree of teacher expertise. This comprehensive literature review compiles international studies on bilingual education instructors published from 1995 to 2020. This study compares and contrasts theories and studies about the skills that bilingual secondary school teachers need to have. The goal is to come up with a professional competence model for these teachers. This systematic evaluation of 79 individual reports finds 16 convergent competencies, mostly emphasizing language competency and pedagogical/psychological understanding. It also has big effects on how bilingual teachers are trained, like making students better at academic language skills, working together, and understanding research on bilingual education.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was descriptive correlational, focusing solely on quantitative methods. In descriptive research, numbers were gathered and analyzed to find patterns, relationships, and trends. Correlational research, on the other hand, looks at how strongly two or more variables are linked (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

A stratified random sample method was used in this research. This approach aimed to incorporate various viewpoints and experiences within the context of bilingual education. The sample size was determined by the objective of attaining saturation in qualitative data and guaranteeing statistical power for quantitative analysis.

The respondents for this study was drawn from the teaching staff at a bilingual school in Ho Chi Minh City. Inclusion criteria dictated that participants must actively hold teaching roles, covering a spectrum of subjects and grade levels within the school. The study aimed to capture insights from educators with varying durations of employment, including both experienced teachers and those who are relatively new to the school. Participation in the research will be voluntary, with teachers expressing a willingness to engage in surveys, interviews, and potential classroom observations, forming the core of the participant pool.

With 67 teachers in the community, the research applied the rules of Slovin's formula. With 0.05% margin of error, there were 65 invited teacher-respondents to be part of the data collection.

In terms of the instruments used, building upon Statement of the Problem 1, this section assesses the extent of in-house PD programs. Questions include the frequency of participation, types of PD attended, and the perceived relevance of these programs to their teaching practices. It draws inspiration from Mojumder's (2021) exploration of teachers' training effects. In line with achieving the second SOP, this section is presented as a Likert scale that asks teachers to report their level of competence in using new teaching methods, adapting to different students' needs, managing the classroom well, keeping students interested, and using reflective practices. This is another Likert scale that identifies the level of influence of PD programs on teacher competence in looking at linguistic competence, pedagogical competence, cultural competence, social competence, and professional competence.

RESULTS

This study analyzed the internal professional development (PD) programs at Bilingual International School in Ho Chi Minh City, assessing their implementation extent, impact on teachers' competency, and the correlation between these factors. Data were collected from 67 teacher respondents utilizing a validated survey instrument and evaluated through descriptive and inferential statistics.

Extent of Implementation of In-House Professional Development Programs

The findings indicated that the in-house professional development programs were executed to a significant degree, with an overall composite mean of 3.53 ($SD = 0.54$). Of the five components, Integration of Innovative Teaching Methods received the highest ranking ($M = 3.59$), followed by Adaptability to Diverse Learning Needs ($M = 3.56$), Effective Classroom Management ($M = 3.55$), and Student

Engagement ($M = 3.54$). The Application of Reflective Practices yielded the lowest mean ($M = 3.40$), however it remained within the "With Extent" group.

The findings revealed that professional development initiatives predominantly focused on instructional innovation, classroom practices, and learner engagement, but reflective and inquiry-based elements were less regularly integrated into the professional development activities.

Level of Influence of PD Programs on Teachers' Competence

The findings indicated that in-house professional development programs significantly impacted instructors' overall competency, yielding a composite mean of 3.61 ($SD = 0.50$). Pedagogical Competence had the highest ranking ($M = 3.65$), followed by Professional Competence ($M = 3.64$), Linguistic Competence ($M = 3.60$), Social Competence ($M = 3.60$), and Cultural Competence ($M = 3.57$).

The results indicated that professional development programs significantly improved instructors' teaching skills, professional dedication, and communication abilities. Nonetheless, cultural competence, while still significantly affected, was substantially less prioritized than other domains of competence.

Relationship Between the Extent of PD Implementation and Teachers' Competence

A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed to ascertain the link between the degree of implementation of professional development programs and their impact on instructors' competency. The research revealed a robust positive and statistically significant connection ($r = 0.94$, $p = 0.018$).

This finding suggested that when the degree of PD implementation escalated, the level of instructors' competency proportionately rose. The null hypothesis, which posited no meaningful association between the two variables, was thus rejected.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings indicated that comprehensive and methodical in-house professional development programs significantly enhanced instructors' ability. The elevated degree of professional development implementation indicated the school's robust institutional backing for professional learning, especially in domains of instructional innovation, classroom management, and student engagement. This conclusion corroborated previous research indicating that professional development programs must be cohesive, maintained, and linked with classroom reality to provide significant results (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2024).

Notwithstanding the generally high implementation, reflective practices surfaced as the most deficient element. This discovery corresponds with contemporary literature suggesting that reflection is frequently neglected in school-based professional development due to time limitations and the prevalence of workshop-style training (Tsaliki et al., 2024). The minimal focus on reflective inquiry indicated that, although instructors received ideas and approaches, there were less chances for them to critically analyze and enhance their practices via systematic reflection and action research.

The significant impact of PD programs on teachers' competence underscores the efficacy of school-based professional development in enhancing pedagogical, professional, and language abilities. The significant influence on pedagogical competence indicated that professional development activities were well aligned with instructional objectives and classroom requirements, corroborating findings from meta-analyses that associated involvement in professional development with enhanced teaching quality and lesson efficacy (Ventista, 2023). Likewise, the significant impact on professional competence suggested that professional development enhanced teachers' enthusiasm, ethical standards, and dedication to lifelong learning.

The somewhat diminished impact on cultural competence indicated that multicultural and intercultural aspects, although evident, had not yet been completely integrated into professional development frameworks. This conclusion aligns with research indicating that cultural competency typically remains at the awareness stage until deliberately included into curriculum design, evaluation methods, and educational policies (Eden et al., 2024).

The robust positive connection between professional development implementation and teachers' competence affirmed that implementation fidelity was a crucial factor in determining professional development effectiveness. This conclusion corroborated prior research highlighting that the quality, coherence, and longevity of professional development programs are more significant determinants of teacher growth than the frequency of such programs alone (Amemasor et al., 2025). The outcome further validated the establishment of an Enhanced In-House Professional Development Program that prioritized contemplation, cooperation, and teacher leadership.

Recommendations

As it is reflected in the conclusions, the following recommendations were proposed:

For the teachers, encourage educators to participate in continuous reflective practice by keeping professional diaries, exchanging best practices during Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and incorporating insights from professional development into their classroom innovations and cross-cultural engagements.

The researchers also liked to recommend the use of the Proposed Enhanced In-House Personal Development Programs embedded in the output of the study.

The findings suggested that the school administrators and professional development coordinators at Bilingual International School in Ho Chi Minh City the following: (a) Enhance the current in-house professional development framework by integrating additional reflective, research-driven, and leadership-oriented activities. The existing programs have successfully improved instructional practices via workshops, mentoring, and collaborative lesson preparation; however, incorporating chances for reflective teaching, action research, and teacher leadership development would facilitate more comprehensive professional growth. By fostering a balance between practice-based and inquiry-based learning, the school could enhance teachers' roles as reflective practitioners, instructional innovators, and active participants in the ongoing enhancement of the institution's educational environment; (b) Incorporate post-training coaching, peer demonstration, and lesson-based follow-up sessions to strengthen teachers' ability to apply innovative strategies effectively and sustainably; (c) Integrate structured workshops on differentiated instruction and inclusive classroom planning to deepen teachers' capacity to address diverse learning

profiles effectively; (d) Embed peer observation, feedback, and collaborative reflection sessions into PD activities to deepen teachers' adaptive management and reflective competence; (e) Strengthen PD on formative assessment, feedback, and inquiry-based learning to elevate teachers' capacity to foster meaningful student engagement across subjects; (f) Institutionalize guided reflection activities such as teaching journals, lesson portfolios, and post-observation conferences to cultivate teachers' reflective and research-based professionalism.

For policy makers and curriculum innovators, it is recommended to establish professional development frameworks that enhance multicultural competence, foster collaborative problem-solving, and encourage teacher-led inquiry, ensuring alignment with overarching school objectives for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Support structures, including recognition systems, research funding, and mentorship programs, can incentivize ongoing professional development.

For the school, it is recommended to establish continuous, data-driven evaluation mechanisms for professional development to ensure ongoing alignment between program execution and competency results. Consistent monitoring, reflective follow-up sessions, and focused coaching must be incorporated to sustain the robust implementation-influence link and guarantee the ongoing development of teacher competence in alignment with the school's evolving instructional demands.

Future researchers were urged to broaden this study by incorporating a bigger and more diverse cohort of educators from various multilingual and international institutions to enhance the generalizability of the results. They may also utilize mixed-method or longitudinal designs to investigate in greater detail how in-house professional development (PD) programs affect teachers' competency over time. Subsequent research could substantiate and enhance the suggested Enhanced In-House PD Framework (RICL Model) by executing it as an action-oriented intervention and evaluating its enduring effects on teacher performance, professional development, and student learning outcomes.

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