

# **A case study: The impact of summer in-service teacher training on teacher change \ Nghiên cứu về thay đổi của giáo viên dưới tác động của chương trình bồi dưỡng chuyên môn nghiệp vụ hè. M.A Thesis Linguistics: \ Tổng Thị Thu**

## **1. Rationale**

The government has been showing its commitment to educational reform for the last few years. In 2008, the Vietnamese Prime Minister issued Decree N° 1400/QĐ-TTg on approving the National Plan for “Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Formal Education System in the period of 2008 - 2020”, according to which one of the major tasks is to enhance teacher professionalism and develop a professional force which is able to implement the new curriculum. In order to achieve the goal of the new curriculum, teachers really need great support in different aspects to help them grow professionally. Hence, The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) focused on developing teachers by encouraging INSET activities among teachers as a mandatory requirement. As a result, INSET activities, which usually appeared in the form of short workshops, have been organized annually during the summer time by the Department of Education and Training of Vinh Phuc to EFL teachers in order to encourage them in their classroom teaching improvement. The purpose of my thesis is then to investigate the impact of summer in-service workshops on teacher change in their classrooms in Yen Lac Secondary school (YLSS), in Vinh Phuc, with the focus on their opinions of the effectiveness, the limitations and the practice of these short courses in their classrooms.

## **2. Aims and objectives of the study**

The study aims to find out the impact of summer in-service workshops on teachers’ teaching practices as reported by the teachers participating in these workshops

In order to achieve the above aim, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To understand teachers’ opinions of the impact of summer in-service workshops on their teaching.

2. To explore how summer in-service workshops affect their actual classroom teaching.

### **3. Research questions**

The following research questions guide my investigation:

1. What are teachers' opinions of the impact of summer in-service workshops on their teaching?

2. What are teachers' opinions of the limitations of the summer in-service workshops?

3. What impact do the summer in-service workshops have on teachers' classroom teaching?

### **4. Scope of the study**

It would be too ambitious for this small-scale thesis to specify all aspects of in-service teacher training activities. Therefore, the researcher would like to focus only on the impact of summer in-service workshops on teachers' classroom teaching. The subjects of the thesis are three EFL teachers of YLSS.

### **5. Methods of the study**

With reference to the aims of the study, a semi-structured interview in the first stage of the study was conducted. This was followed by classroom observations, which were for the purpose to probe deeply into the impact of short in-service workshops on teacher's classroom teaching. In the last place of the study, a post-observation interview was made to find out the major barriers of the implementation of the training content. These procedures were aimed at collecting rich data about views on the impact of the summer in-service workshops on teachers' classroom practice through the teachers' opinions and their classroom teaching.

### **6. Significance of the study**

Findings from this case study can provide teacher educators and administrators useful information about the needed improvement on teacher in-service workshops. Such improvement is to support teacher change better so that the quality of English language teaching at the high school can be raised.

## PART B: DEVELOPMENT

### CHAPTER 1

#### THE LITERATURE REVIEW

##### 1. Teacher Training and Teacher Development

	Teacher training Process of direct intervention	Teacher development Process of influence
Characteristics of aspects of teaching focused on	Generally accessible; can be mastered through specific courses of action	Idiosyncratic and individual; mature through constant attention, critique, and involvement of the teacher in his or her teaching
Constituent base Focus	Knowledge and skills Initiated by collaborator, work carried out by teacher	Attitude and awareness Raised by collaborator, but work initiated by teacher
Criteria for assessing change	External; accessible to the collaborator	Internal; personal to teacher
Closure	Can be within a fixed time period, once criteria are satisfied	Is open-ended; work continues until teacher decides to stop

*Table 1.1. Differences between training and development (Freeman, 1989, p. 42)*

For the purpose of this study, which looks at the impact of short summer workshops on teachers' classroom teaching, the term 'training' is used. This is because the aims and objectives of these workshops are to provide teachers with new discrete teaching skills and classroom techniques.

## **2. Continuing Professional Development and In-service Teacher Training**

The term continuing professional development refers to all the activities in which teachers engage during the course of a career which are designed to enhance their work' (Day & Sachs, 2004, p.3). CPD is often described in the literature using terms such as staff development, career development, human resource development, continuing education and lifelong learning. The term is also widely used interchangeably with the term in-service teacher training.

Teachers, in general, in Vinh Phuc province are relatively of lower level in knowledge and teaching skills, which has well affected and is still affecting the achievement of the goal of the provincial education, especially the one of elementary and secondary schooling. In-service teacher training is regarded as best way to improve the teachers' abilities and skills. But the existing problems, such as teachers' personal need, inefficient training, and financial problems, prevent in-service teacher training from functioning in improving the teachers' quality in the locality.

## **3. INSET activities and their impact on teacher development**

The terms CPD and in-service teacher training (INSET) are sometimes interchangeably used. INSET can be defined as all in-service teacher training activities that professionally qualified teachers engage in to improve their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes and to educate learners more effectively (Roberts, 1998).

## **4. Factors affecting the actualization of INSET activities**

In any context, the INSET choices made or available depend on societal expectations of teachers, school/local education authorities' requirements, the contextual culture in which teachers work and subsequently their own values and beliefs as well.

## **5. Studies on the impact of short training workshops on teacher change**

One of the greatest concerns in teacher development is how to bridge the gap between theory and practice. In general, there is a shared opinion that both theory and practice are of crucial importance for language teacher education (Stern & Strevens, 1983). Training, as observed by Duff (1988), should be practical and directly applicable to the teaching context. At the same time, there is a broad agreement that practice needs to be based on theory (Duff, 1988).

Recently, there has been interest in the effect of INSET courses on teachers' latter practice. There has been a clash between the new and the traditional, illustrated by

comparing INSET course content with later classroom practice. In Vietnam, Lewis and McCook (2002) examined the views of 14 Vietnamese high school teachers of English, as expressed in their journal entries during on-going INSET workshops conducted by the researchers themselves. The results showed that teachers were applying what they had been introduced to during the course. However, these were reported by the teachers themselves and no observational data were provided to justify what they stated.

For many years in Vietnam and in many other developing countries, in-service training workshops or short-term courses that would offer teachers new information on a particular aspect of their work. Particularly in the context of Vietnamese secondary schools, this has been the only type of training teachers would receive.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE STUDY**

#### **1. The case and participants**

The study involved three EFL teachers working in Yen Lac Secondary School (YLSS), which is located in a countryside district of Vinh Phuc. It is a relatively large school with about 1600 students in the three final grades (Grades 10 to 12); most of the students come from farmer families. The average class size in this school is around 40 and the classrooms are cramped with very basic school facilities.

Participants in my study consist of three English-language teachers at YLSS. They are thus full time teachers, a male and two female teachers with a minimum of three years' experience of teaching English. Two of them graduated from University of Languages and International Studies - VNU Hanoi, while the other teacher graduated from the local Teacher Training College, Phu Tho. One of the reasons for including such a selection of teachers is to be able to generate a broad range of opinions, insights and experiences of EFL teachers about summer in-service workshops. The choice will thus ensure that participants in my study are teachers with sufficient experience in both TEFL and in INSET.

#### **2. Research methods**

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the study, three instruments were used to collect the data: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and post-observation interviews. By using these different instruments, I was able to achieve the

triangulation of the data, thereby increasing the reliability and credibility of the findings (Denzin, 1978).

### **3. Findings:**

#### **3.1 Teachers' opinions of the impact of the summer in-service workshops on their teaching**

##### **Effectiveness of New Teaching Strategies and Classroom Techniques**

Teachers in the study identified the usefulness of the various teaching techniques and strategies learned in the in-service workshops to help them improve their classroom practice. They noted that the trainers provided them with numerous ways in which teachers had opportunities to practice different teaching models that they could use in the classroom.

Overall, teachers thought that summer in-service workshops encouraged them to look at interactive approaches for engaging student learning.

##### **Effectiveness of Trainer Teaching Strategies and Classroom Techniques**

Teachers in the study felt that the trainers and their teaching methods in the training workshops were the also contributing factors in ensuring the success of the programme.

However, the teachers also noted that not all the trainers used the same techniques. They felt that some trainers, especially the local head teachers, could not provide enough depth of knowledge and teaching techniques because of their limitation of the fields.

To sum up, teachers found that they were able to improve both their content knowledge and pedagogical skills as a result of attending the workshops. The practical teaching methods adopted by the trainers in the workshops appeared to be the good models in the in-service training workshops.

#### **3.2 Teachers' opinions of the limitations of the summer in-service workshops**

##### **One-size-fits-all in-service training workshops**

In response to the research question concerning the limitations of the in-service workshops, most teachers seemed to object to being offered the same programs for the same participants because teachers have different knowledge background and teaching experiences. Interviewees also criticized the provider-led approach of summer in-service

workshops in Vinh Phuc for providing various curricula and modes of delivery, but only according to their own interest, expertise and experience.

### **Lack of monitoring and evaluation**

Teachers stressed that monitoring of the training content needed to be carried out to ensure that teachers were doing what they were supposed to be doing and ensured that the skills and knowledge learnt in the training was being transferred into classroom practice.

The interviewed teachers were quite frank that they were not willing to apply new ideas of teaching unless their classes were observed by inspectors. The teachers stated that much attention was paid to the in-service training programs, though nothing was done to evaluate whether these programs worked. That contributed to the limitations of the in-service training workshops.

### **Lack of support in implementing the training content**

Teachers in the study noted that receiving little or no support from the administrators and their colleagues was one of the biggest barriers to the implementation of the new teaching strategies and classroom techniques into classroom practice. They noted that because little support was received, they tended to revert to the traditional way of teaching. They felt that this lack of support and the lack of interest led to their unwillingness to transfer what had been learnt in the training into the classroom.

In short, teachers' views are worth analyzing for any issues concerning in-service training workshops, as they are the frontline workers who understand the crisis as well as the opportunities when any changes are put forward. It would be a total mistake if teachers do not recognize the rationale and method during the implementation of any education policy and programs.

## **3.3 The impact of the summer in-service workshops on teachers' classroom teaching**

### ***Observation data***

The observations showed that the classroom teaching grammar lessons remained traditional, teacher-centered and textbook-centred. Discrete grammatical points were presented in isolated contexts, and grammar rules were explained almost always in Vietnamese. Although the teachers did ask a lot of questions, they answered most of them themselves. And there were hardly any students responding to the teachers' questions

during the class time, they kept silent for some reasons; they seemed to hesitate in giving wrong answers or being corrected in front of the class and so on.

For the skills lessons, teachers tried to finish all the tasks in the textbook with little regard to how much the pupils learned, or to what extent the pupils could use target language for communication. Vietnamese was used to present vocabulary, explain the grammatical structures, checking student's comprehension, even for basic classroom instructions. For example, during the Reading lesson, the teachers gave the pupils a chance to practise reading aloud the written texts and translate them into Vietnamese, rather than help them develop their reading skills, or encouraging them to discuss meaning among them, or with the teacher.

### ***Post-Observation Interview data***

The post-observation interview explored the reason why new discrete teaching skills and classroom techniques provided by the summer in-service workshops courses were not applied in the classroom.

All the participants quite agreed that they learned a lot of new things from these short courses but confessed that these new teaching techniques did not change the way they taught. Their most important concern was how to finish the prescribed lessons in the textbook, rather than to organize pair work/group work or activities to develop student' language competence.

These reasons influenced the way of teaching English in the case school; the teachers tend to teach in traditional methods which were so familiar to them in the pre-service teacher education. Some short in-service training courses might bring them some "fresh air" of the teaching innovation policy. However, the observed lessons reflected that these courses failed to help them change their way of teaching English.

In conclusion, research question three was concerned with the implementation of new teaching strategies and classroom techniques in teachers' classroom. This research question sought to identify the barriers of the successful implementation of the training content into classroom practice. Although teachers perceived the usefulness of the new teaching methods in the training workshops there are numerous barriers to the implementation of those into classroom practice and they remained unchanged in their traditional way of teaching. One of the most notable and striking was the teaching and learning context: too large class with very basic facilities, which prevented teachers from



applying interactive activities effectively. The teachers themselves, their performance and their unwillingness to implement training ideas into the classroom were identified as being significant. Some noted that a contributing factor in teacher unwillingness was due to the must of recovery of the intended lessons and some outside inconvenience of the classroom.

### **3.4. Discussion of the findings**

Findings from the study have indicated that there is a wide gap between the intended teaching skills and classroom techniques of short in-service training workshops and the implementation in English classes in the case school. While the educational providers organized many summer workshops with a hope that to help change the English teaching for communicative goal, the class observation reflected EFL teachers hardly changed their way of teaching English: textbook-based, test-oriented and teacher-fronted (Wang, 2008) (in Canh & Roger, 2009). They appeared to be concerned about how to cover everything in the textbook, which is very popular among EFL teachers in other schools in Vinh Phuc, rather than create opportunities for students to use the target language. There seemed to be lack of motivation for the teachers to implement what is intended by the in-service training workshops because of the limitations of the courses and the school context. From the study data, to help change in teaching and learning culture, there raised teachers' perception of the implementation of the summer in-service workshops with the recognition of educational authorities in monitoring and evaluating the teachers' efforts.

## **PART C CONCLUSIONS**

### **1. Conclusions of the study**

After reviewing the impact of summer in-service workshops on EFL teacher's classroom practice as perceived by EFL teachers in the case school, the summary of the major findings will be presented in the following paragraphs. By comparing the teachers' opinions, the literature and the effectiveness of the training courses in promoting professionalism among teachers in Yen Lac Secondary School, it is hoped to get further insights into issues concerning the classroom teaching of teachers. In the last section, the writer offers certain suggestions based on the findings of this research for schools and policy-maker to better plan for teachers in-service training activities in the future.

Two important findings are shown in this study. Firstly, although teachers did not regard the in-service teacher training workshops to be the most helpful in improving their own teaching, they still participated quite actively in these workshops during their teaching time. Secondly, the limitations of these workshops are pointed out by the teacher participants in those workshops. Such limitations include the content fitness, the educational authorities' monitoring and evaluation as well as the support of the principal. All of these factors contribute to the success of the training workshops. However, it is doubtful that EFL teachers' classroom practice is effective because of the barriers recognized by the observed teachers in the post-observation interview.

## **2. Limitations of the study**

The study is just a small case study with only three teachers being involved. Therefore, no generalization of the findings was intended. The semi-structured interviews were not long enough plus my interviewing experience and skills. The interview data were consequently shallow. What the teachers stated does not reflect their thought faithfully because of the power relationship between me – a provincial specialist – and the interviewed teachers. Each teacher was observed only twice and they were informed of the observational schedule well in advance. The teachers may behave differently when they were not observed.

Despite the limitations, the findings of the study were informative regarding the impact of the summer in-service workshops on teacher change. The findings may also be similar in other similar schools.

## **3. Suggestions to enhance INSET activities**

In order to improve the current situation, the summer in-service workshops should be re-organized taking into account teachers' needs. The workshop should also spend more time for teachers to experiment with the new ideas through the application of micro-teaching and trainers' modelling in the real classroom with real students. This is necessary to convince teachers as well as to identify the appropriateness of the innovative teaching ideas and strategies.

## **4. Suggestions for Further Research**

The topic needs further investigating. Future studies should be conducted using the same multiple methods but with different schools in a longer time. A mixed method design could be used. Specifically, a large-scale questionnaire survey is conducted, which is

followed by cross-case studies. A simulated recall technique can be used to elicit teachers about where the ideas underlying their classroom teaching came from, i.e. whether they acquired those ideas from the workshops or from their experience or from their colleagues, etc.