



## ENGLISH TEACHERS' SATISFACTION WITH THE QUALITY OF GENERAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TRAINING PROGRAM: THE CASE OF THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

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### Abstract:

Many policy changes in teaching and learning English in Vietnam have been implemented. To make those changes successful, the quality of English teachers is paid remarkable attention to by stakeholders. In particular, the quality of their teaching is said to be the determining factor in the success or failure of the changes. Since then, many professional development programs for English teachers have been implemented in Vietnam. This research explores Vietnamese teachers' satisfaction with the effectiveness of a large-scale general English proficiency training program provided by MOET's National Foreign Languages Project for school teachers in the Mekong Delta. Employing questionnaires with 174 school teachers in the Mekong Delta, the study sheds light on the main factors that these teachers perceive as crucial factors that influence the quality of the training program and their satisfaction. Findings from the survey reveal that the teachers were highly satisfied with the training program, and the critical factors impacting the training effectiveness included training materials, training duration, teaching and learning facilities, qualified trainers, and support from management. These findings provide a solid foundation for proposing an efficient model training program to effectively support English language teachers in the Mekong Delta to accomplish the required English proficiency level.

**Keywords:** language proficiency, factors, in-service training program

### 1. Introduction

Teacher professionalization has been upgraded, and in-service training for teachers has received significant interest in sustainable education. In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) issued the Vietnamese National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) in 2008 to enhance the quality of English language teaching and learning

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across all school levels in Vietnam. Apparently, the NFLP promulgated an official document about the required English language proficiency levels to English language teachers at different school levels. Specifically, the language teachers at primary and lower-secondary levels need to reach CEFR-V Level 4, and the target language proficiency of the language teachers at the upper-secondary levels is CEFR-V Level 5. It is recognized that the language teachers' general proficiency significantly affects how they use language in the classroom to promote learning and enhance the students' learning outcomes. As a result, language teachers are required to undergo English language proficiency training courses to reach their target proficiency level. The primary purpose of this in-service teacher training is to increase the language teachers' levels of language proficiency so that they can satisfy the requirements of language competence promulgated in 2014, as well as professional standards issued by MOET in 2018. Since then, many previous studies on the effectiveness of in-service training programs to upgrade school teachers' general English proficiency have been conducted to explore the most suitable in-service training models for school teachers in Vietnam; however, the effectiveness of in-service training has resulted differently amongst regions in Vietnam.

The Mekong Delta of Vietnam is a socio-economic region with 13 provinces and cities, a total area of 40,816.4 square kilometers, and a population of more than 17 million people. In the past decades, the Government has paid attention and introduced many policies to promote the Mekong Delta's educational development with the goals of achieving parity with the national average by 2010 and reaching above the national average of the development index of all majors and study levels by 2020. With specific positive changes, education in this region, however, still has many limitations and shortcomings. As the Central Government (2017) stated, *"the educational level and the applications of advanced science and technology in the region are lower than the national average; the quality of education and health remains lower than the required level..."*. Thus, this is a big challenge for the Mekong Delta, not only in the process of comprehensive and sustainable development. Within that context, the general English proficiency of English teachers in the region reflects somewhat similar pictures. In fact, a number of English teachers are still struggling to gain the target English proficiency level as regulated by the MOET. It is, thus, essential to find out what can help increase the effectiveness of general English proficiency training programs to help boost the enhancement of English education in specific and the general development of the region. Since the MOET's Official Document was promulgated on 25th February 2014, school teachers in Vietnam have attended several in-service training programs to upgrade their English language proficiency. Obviously, the learning outcomes have been concisely stated in related official documents about in-service teachers' training programs published by MOET. In reality, there were conferences on improving school teachers' English language proficiency organized by Vietnam's National Foreign Languages Project to evaluate the quality of in-service training conducted in some provinces in Vietnam (2015; 2017); however, a study on the trainees' voice to an in-service training program in Mekong Delta has been precisely essential to a broader view of the in-service teachers training program in

Vietnam. Therefore, in an in-service training program, the proper methods or approaches should be suitable to the objectives, contents, ability of the particular participants, and facilities available in the training program (Bramley, 1986). Consequently, it is necessary to find out about the satisfaction of teachers participating in the training program with respect to the above factors. The current study was conducted to answer the following research question:

- To what extent do English teachers, in the case of the Vietnamese context, feel satisfied with the quality of the general English proficiency training program?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Professional Development

There have been several studies on professional development as well as an equivalent number of PD definitions. Bolam (2002) defined *professional development* (PD) as the constant advancement of professional skills and knowledge throughout one's teaching career. Kuijpers et al. (2010) conceptualized the term "PD" as a process that a teacher forms his/her professional identity. Participating in PD events helps teachers progress in applying innovations introduced over the years in the teaching fields (Avidov-Ungar, 2016). Besides, the changing work environment requires teachers to develop continuously (Darling-Hammond, 2005). According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), PD helps increase teachers' understanding of how teaching and learning work; it, therefore, betters their teaching in practice. More importantly, with PD, teachers are expected to promote their knowledge, skills, and values to meet the national needs, school needs, and their own needs (Fraser et al., 2007).

### 2.2 Factors Affecting Teachers' Satisfaction with a Training Program

Investigation into the quality of in-service training programs in different global contexts has significantly resulted in different previous studies. Hustler et al. (2003) argued that the design of in-service teachers' training programs should be appropriate to the needs of society and the specific needs of individual participants. Also, Gamble and Burns (2005) also suggested that teacher training would get the best effect if it met the participants' needs. Furthermore, according to Harris et al. (2012), the effectiveness of in-service training very much depends on the materials and resources used and whether new materials are created during the course. Similarly, Kuh (2009) stated that the significant components that influence the quality of in-service teachers' training programs include adequate resources, training time frame, and teaching methods. Of course, these essential components have to be relevant to the course objectives for the learners to obtain their outcomes. Hill et al. (2020) claimed that clear course objectives definitely help determine the expected outcome as well as a planned evaluation at the end of the course. In addition, according to Agarwal and Kamlesrao (1997), another vital component determining the quality of in-service teachers' training programs includes adequate training time for the training content so that learners obtain the training goals.

Besides the time frame, Agarwal and Kamlesrao (1997) also mentioned that the choice of appropriate teaching methodology and resources is essential to in-service teachers' training programs.

### **2.3 Related Studies**

Nasser and Shabti (2010) conducted a study to examine the relationship between teacher satisfaction with their professional development and their backgrounds and motivation. Teachers participating in 38 professional development programs were invited to partake in this study. The results collected from a questionnaire show that the teachers demonstrated different motivation patterns and perceived the impact of the professional development training on their teaching differently. Teacher motivation and their perceptions of the effectiveness of professional development strongly affected their satisfaction with the programs.

Bayar and Kösterelioglu (2014) examined the level of satisfaction of Turkish teachers in their participating professional development activities. This study was conducted as a qualitative study using in-depth interviews to collect data. The results show that Turkish teachers were not satisfied with their existing professional development activities because they perceived the events to be out-of-date, they were not given chances to participate in the designing process, the programs failed to meet their educational needs, the training staff was not qualified to provide the teachers with sufficient training and practical lessons.

Differently, Reeves and Pedulla (2011) employed a study to investigate the factors affecting teacher satisfaction with online professional development activities. Besides, this study measured the level of teacher satisfaction with the activities. The sample population was 3998 teachers serving the teaching profession in the USA but not completing the enrolling courses. The study concluded that several factors affected teacher satisfaction with online professional development activities. The study also indicated teachers' low satisfaction with enrolling in professional development programs.

It can be seen that the topic of professional development for teachers has never stopped motivating researchers to do their research. Similarly, this study was conducted in a different context from the above studies. In particular, Vietnam is a place where education stakeholders are very concerned about the quality of professional development programs for English teachers. Therefore, this study promises to bring significant results for the quality of English language teaching in Vietnam in particular and other countries in the world in general.

### **3. Material and Methods**

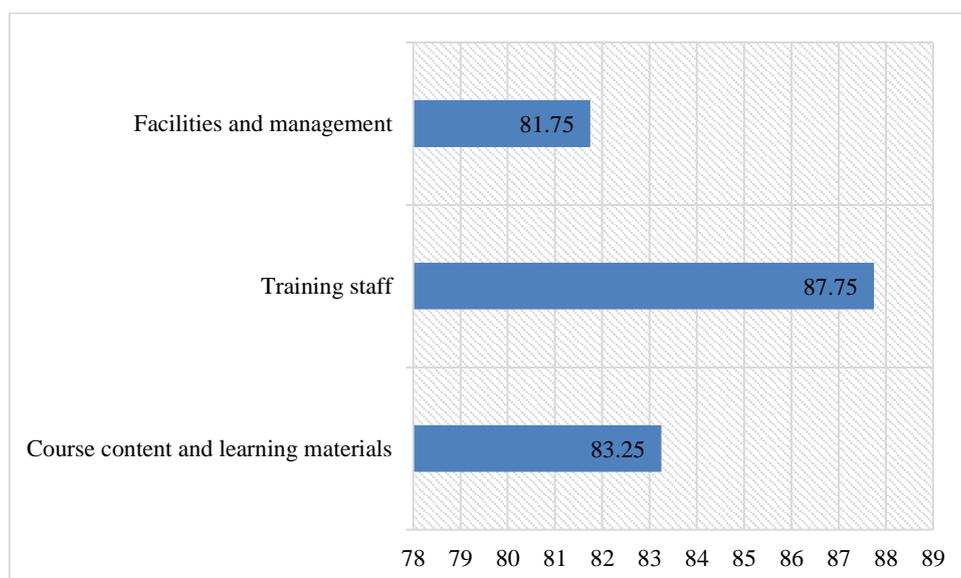
This current study was conducted quantitatively. A questionnaire was designed to seek answers to the research question regarding teachers' satisfaction with the effectiveness of the general English training program in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. According to Jack

and Clarke (1998), a questionnaire is beneficial as respondents will have more time to think of the questionnaire items before they respond, especially if questionnaires can be taken away and returned later. Additionally, questionnaires can be utilized to obtain a general picture of the characteristics of a large population sample (Dörnyei, 2003). In this current study, the questionnaires were designed based on a four-point Likert-scale type (1=Strongly unsatisfied, 2=Unsatisfied, 3=Satisfied, 4=Strongly satisfied) and delivered to the teachers in hard copies. Before delivering the official questionnaire to the research participants, the instrument was piloted with 30 respondents who shared the same characteristics as the actual participants. Remarkably, the pilot participants also participated in a training on general English proficiency training program, but it had been organized in the North of Vietnam. With the responses collected from the pilot participants, the items were rewritten to help increase their readability, and Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha=.91$ ) indicated the reliability of the instrument. A number of 200 English teachers in the Mekong Delta who had participated in the general English proficiency training were invited to answer the questionnaire. After being fully informed of the purpose of this study by the author, 174 out of them volunteered to join and respond to the questionnaire. The participants all graduated from university and got a bachelor's degree or higher in English language education. Among them, 174 teachers (38 males, 136 females) sent back their responses.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Teachers' overall satisfaction with the program

Figure 1 displays the results of the teachers' satisfaction with the program in general.



**Figure 1:** Teachers' overall satisfaction with the program

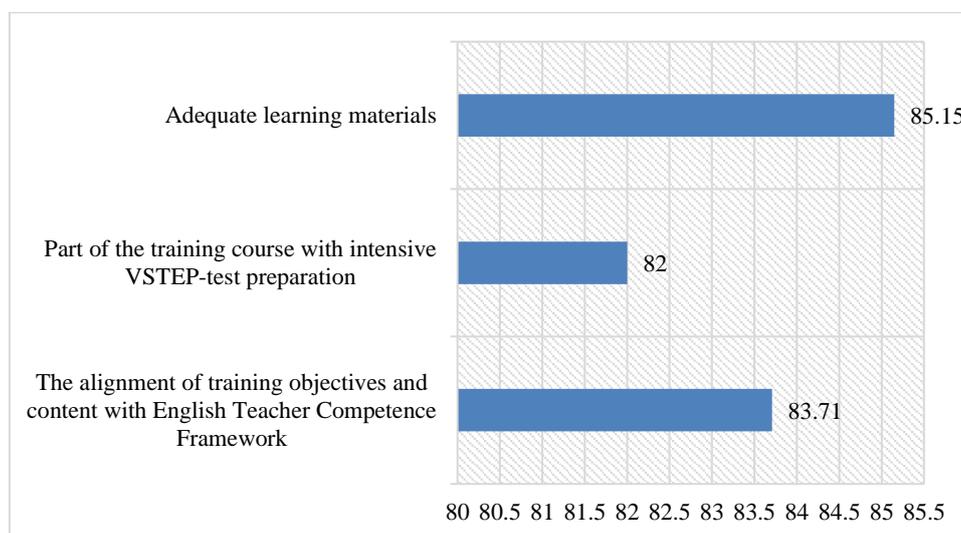
Based on the results, the teachers were most satisfied with the training staff (87.75%), followed by the course content and learning materials (83.25%) and facilities

and management (81.75%). Based on the extent of teacher satisfaction, the administrators of the professional development program were very interested in the quality of the training team. The results are similar to the study by Tran et al. (2021), which indicated that the quality of training staff decides whether or not the quality of a teacher's professional development training is qualified. In contrast, the teachers seemed quite satisfied with the program's course content, learning materials, facilities, and management. To get the training content suitable to the needs of the teachers, it is necessary to investigate their needs before conducting the training. The study by Bayar and Kösterelioğlu (2014) proved that teachers lost their motivation to participate in the programs lacking their participation in the designing stage. However, in Vietnam, the training often does not follow that procedure but relies more on the subjective opinions of the program designers (Do, 2020). In other words, professional training needs more discussions with teachers to fit their learning needs better.

Regarding learning materials, the potential for Vietnamese access to high-quality teaching and learning materials is somehow not as good as that of other developed countries (Oblina et al., 2022). Therefore, even with remarkable efforts to provide teachers with the most practical materials, the materials also have some limitations. That may be why teachers felt dissatisfied with their learning materials during training compared to their satisfaction with other clusters. Regarding facilities, Vietnam has never been considered a country with the best educational conditions compared to other countries in the world and Southeast Asia in particular (Binh, 2021). Therefore, the results from this study are interpretable. Specifically, the need for more high-quality facilities has reduced teacher satisfaction with the course.

#### 4.2 Teachers' Satisfaction with the Course Content and Training Materials of the Program

The extent of teachers' satisfaction with the course content and training materials of the program is displayed in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Teachers' satisfaction with the course content and training materials of the program

As mentioned in the overall satisfaction with the course, the teachers participating in the training were delighted with the course content and learning materials (>80%). It can be seen that what did make the teachers most dissatisfied with this cluster was the part of the training courses not providing trainees with intensive VSTEP-test preparation (82%). The alignment of training objectives and content with the English Teacher Competence Framework of Vietnamese teachers is also appreciated to a reasonable degree (83.71%). Taking the VSTEP exam to achieve equivalent foreign language proficiency to keep their job is almost mandatory for English teachers in Vietnam (Freeman, 2017). Therefore, participating in the training course is not only meant to improve their professional qualifications but also to ensure that they achieve their desired foreign language degree/certificate.

Surprisingly, the trainees were delighted with their current training materials even though it is considered that Vietnam fails to provide educators with the best learning resources (Oblina et al., 2022). Consequently, it ensures great attention from the government to the development of human resources in Vietnam. It is always believed that the quality of human resources will determine the development of a country. Therefore, the Vietnamese government, with adequate awareness of the impact of human resources quality, has shown significant interest in developing its workforce, especially those serving the teaching profession (Huong & Fry, 2004). As so, making efforts to provide teachers with sufficient learning materials in possibility is the evidence for the abovementioned ideas.

### 4.3 Teachers' Satisfaction with Training Staff of the Program

Figure 3 manifests the level of teacher satisfaction with training staff of the program.

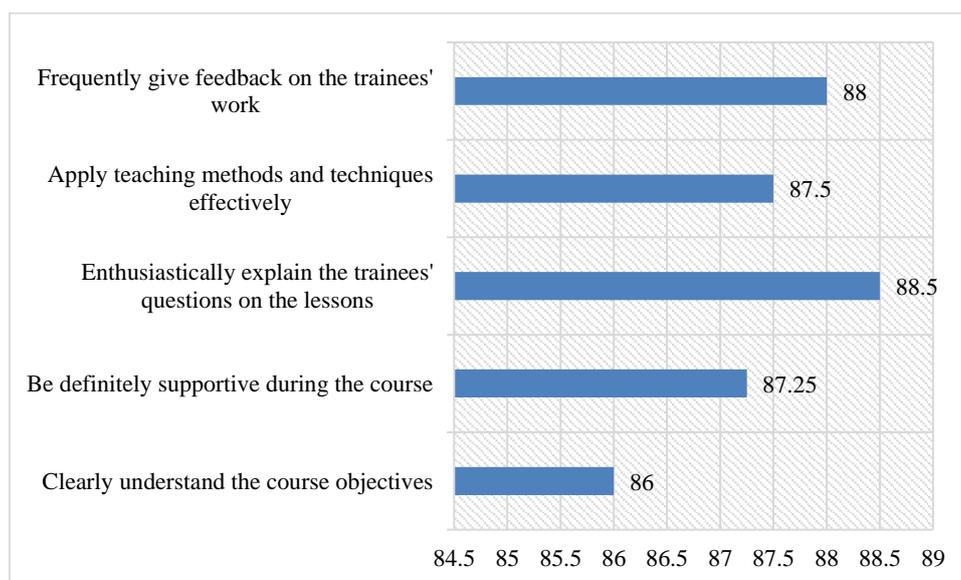


Figure 3: Teachers' satisfaction with training staff of the program

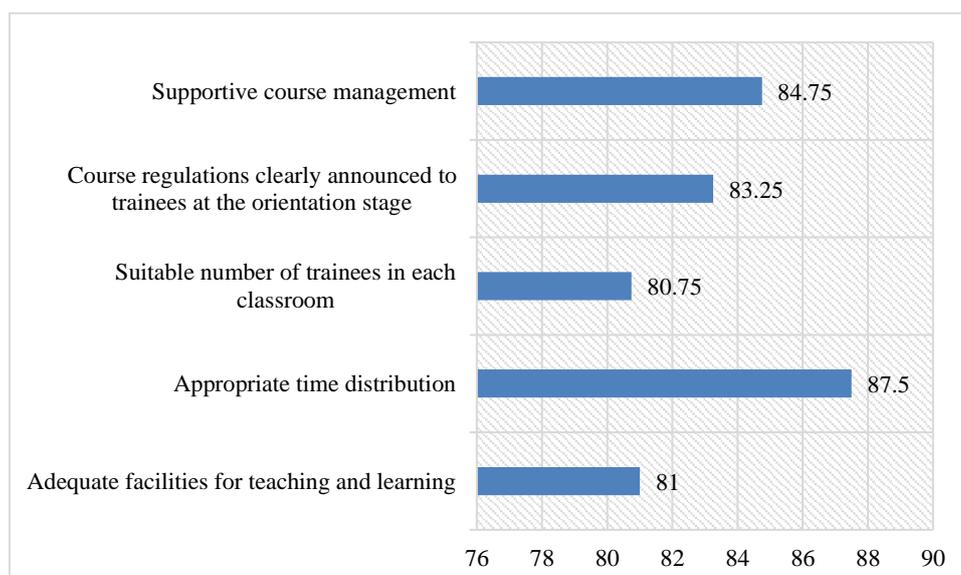
As mentioned, of the three main factors affecting the quality of the program, training staff is the most appreciated by teachers. This shows concern for the professional

quality of the trainer team. It is understandable because, according to Bayar and Kösterelioğlu (2014), trainers are the most critical factor in the quality of teacher professional development programs. Based on the results, teachers appreciate the trainers' enthusiasm for running the program (88.5%). The trainers' enthusiasm will motivate the participants (Wall, 2008). In Vietnam, teachers are always very busy with their schedules (Nguyen et al., 2015), and motivation is a significant factor affecting teachers' participation in professional development programs (Peeraer & Van Petegem, 2012). Therefore, it is not enough to select trainers with sound expertise; trainers must be enthusiastic about supporting teachers in terms of mentality (Collinson et al., 2009).

Similar to the enthusiastic trainers, their understanding of the course objectives was as much appreciated (86%). As mentioned in the previous section, teachers are pretty satisfied with the objectives of the program because they possibly meet their learning desires (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014; Nasser & Shabti, 2010). As a result, it is understandable that the teacher is quite satisfied with the trainers' understanding of the course's objectives. However, many believe that it is probably a problem for the training program not because the trainers do not understand the course objectives but simply because the objectives have not been linked to the teacher's learning needs. Actually, the mismatch between program designers and participants has caused program runners problems. To overcome this, the preparation work before designing the program needs to be done with consideration. Notably, teachers should be allowed to participate in the designing process (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014).

#### 4.4 Teachers' Satisfaction with Facilities and Course Management of the Program

The level of teacher satisfaction with the facilities and course management of the program is displayed in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Teachers' satisfaction with the facilities and course management of the program

Of the three main factors that affect the effectiveness of a professional development program for teachers, facilities and course management are arguably the weakest part of the program. As mentioned, the fact that the establishment needs to have optimal conditions for training programs for teachers is familiar in Vietnam (Hieu et al., 2020). Therefore, it is not surprising to observe what frustrated participating teachers the most has to do with the number of trainees in the training section (80.75) and facilities for teaching and learning (81%). As a developing country, the facilities and infrastructures in Vietnam pose a significant obstacle to the implementation of the training program (Van Tran et al., 2020). Interestingly, the time distribution was rated the highest in this cluster (87.5%). It had to be significant efforts of all training stakeholders, including the trainers, trainees, and administrators, to distribute the training schedule. It is definitely not easy to assign an excellent schedule to all these people in Vietnam because they are well-known for their busy schedules (Van, 2020). Therefore, the sufficient schedule helped teachers be engaged in the training, develop their skills and knowledge, and enhance their satisfaction with the course.

## 5. Conclusion

In the context that English plays a vital role in the economic and social development of the country, the quality of teaching staff has received particular attention. Since then, professional development programs for English teachers in Vietnam have also received great expectations from stakeholders. To measure the quality or effectiveness of the program, only the teachers participating in the program can give the best answer. Therefore, this study was conducted to measure teachers' satisfaction with the professional development program they participate in. Specifically, the study was conducted quantitatively with the participation of 174 English teachers at all levels in Vietnam. The results found after using a questionnaire to collect data show that teachers are satisfied with the quality and effectiveness of the program. Among the factors affecting the quality of a professional development program for teachers, they are most satisfied with the training team. Meanwhile, the content, learning materials, facilities, and course management are less appreciated than in other clusters.

The results show some space for development in organizing professional development programs for teachers in Vietnam. Firstly, the school teachers that are said to be satisfied with the training staff, with a high percentage (87.75%), have exposed the success of this training program. In fact, the training team proving their thorough skills and knowledge development programs before being selected to become an official program member definitely plays a vital part in an effective training program. Second, it is necessary to carefully understand the participants' needs before organizing the agenda and planning the program. Specifically, a needs analysis survey should be sent to teachers so that they know exactly what they need and want from the program. Finally, the management and support staff for the training programs should clearly understand their role in the implementation of the program. There needs to be a link between the

teachers participating in the program and the teams mentioned above to help the teachers when they need it.

## 6. Recommendation

Although this study has partly shown the level of satisfaction of the teachers participating in the training with the program, the quantitative design does not allow the authors to elaborate on the issue. Therefore, the following studies need to supplement qualitative data from in-depth interviews, observations, or document analysis to better explain the participants' perceptions. In addition, to improve the quality of the program, the suggestions of teachers participating in the program can bring more significant results. Similarly, opinions from other stakeholders, such as program managers, training staff, and even supporting teams, should also be heard and considered. Further studies may also explore the similarities and differences in perceptions of successful and unsuccessful participants in the program. The results of these studies will provide multi-dimensional and profound information for the design of training programs in the future.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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