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Management by Objectives in Teacher Development: A Case Study of Primary and Lower Secondary Schools in Thong Nong Commune, Cao Bang Province, Vietnam

Phi Dinh Khuong[1], Be Thanh Binh[2]

[1]Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, TNU - University of Sciences, Thai Nguyen, Viet Nam

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7930-7335

[2]Thong Nong Primary and Lower Secondary School, Cao Bang, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: Teacher development plays a crucial role in improving educational quality, particularly in rural and mountainous areas where disparities in resources and professional opportunities remain significant. This study investigates teacher development in primary and lower secondary schools in Thong Nong commune, Cao Bang province, Vietnam, from a Management by Objectives (MBO) perspective. A descriptive survey design was employed, with data collected from 149 participants, including 138 teachers and 11 school managers. The findings indicate that respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness of the importance of teacher development. In practice, teachers showed relatively strong professional responsibility and pedagogical competence; however, limitations were observed in areas such as information and communication technology (ICT) competence and innovation in teaching methods. Teacher development activities, including professional training, pedagogical meetings, and career support, were implemented in the surveyed schools, but their effectiveness varied across different aspects. From a management perspective, the results reveal that while planning and general direction were relatively well established, weaknesses remained in coordination, monitoring, and outcome-based evaluation. These findings suggest that the application of Management by Objectives can provide a structured and practical framework for improving teacher development by enhancing goal alignment, accountability, and continuous evaluation. The study contributes to the understanding of teacher development management in disadvantaged contexts and offers practical implications for strengthening educational management in rural and mountainous areas.

KEYWORDS: teacher development; Management by Objectives (MBO); educational management; primary and lower secondary schools; rural and mountainous education; Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, improving the quality of teachers has become a central priority in educational reform worldwide. Teachers are widely recognized as the most influential in-school factor affecting students' learning outcomes, and therefore, the development of teacher workforce is considered a key strategy for enhancing educational quality and sustainability (OECD, 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In developing countries, particularly in rural and mountainous areas, this issue becomes even more critical due to disparities in resources, teacher qualifications, and access to professional development opportunities.

In Vietnam, the ongoing implementation of the General Education Reform Program has placed increasing demands on teachers' professional competence, pedagogical innovation, and adaptability to new teaching approaches. The Ministry of Education and Training has emphasized that developing a qualified and competent teaching workforce is a decisive factor in achieving the goals of educational reform (MOET, 2018). However, in many remote and disadvantaged regions, including mountainous communes, teacher development still faces significant challenges such as uneven qualifications, limited access to training, and insufficient management mechanisms to support continuous professional growth.

Thong Nong commune, located in Cao Bang province, represents a typical mountainous area with socio-economic difficulties and limited educational infrastructure. Primary and lower secondary schools in this locality play a crucial role in ensuring access to basic education and improving human capital in the region. Although local teachers have made considerable efforts in fulfilling their professional responsibilities, the process of teacher development in these schools has revealed several shortcomings. These include the lack of clearly defined development goals, limited systematic planning, and insufficient alignment between individual teacher development and institutional objectives.

In this context, Management by Objectives (MBO) has emerged as a relevant and effective management approach that emphasizes goal-setting, participation, performance monitoring, and outcome-based evaluation (Drucker, 1954; Rodgers & Hunter, 1991). In the field of education, MBO can provide a structured framework for aligning teacher development activities with institutional goals, thereby enhancing accountability, motivation, and effectiveness in professional development processes. Previous studies have suggested that applying goal-oriented management approaches can improve organizational performance and employee engagement, including in educational settings (Nguyen & Tran, 2018).

Despite its potential, the application of MBO in teacher development, particularly in rural and mountainous schools in Vietnam, remains underexplored. Most existing studies have focused either on general teacher development or on management practices without systematically integrating a goal-based management framework. Furthermore, empirical evidence from disadvantaged contexts is still limited, leaving a gap in understanding how management approaches such as MBO can be adapted to local conditions.

To address this gap, this study investigates teacher development in primary and lower secondary schools in Thong Nong commune, Cao Bang province, Vietnam, from a Management by Objectives perspective. Using survey data collected from 149 participants, including teachers and school managers, the study examines perceptions, current practices, and management activities related to teacher development. By analyzing the findings within the MBO framework, the study aims to provide practical insights and recommendations for improving teacher development management in similar rural and mountainous contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teacher development in educational contexts

Teacher development has been widely recognized as a continuous and dynamic process that involves improving teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional competencies. It goes beyond initial training and includes ongoing professional learning activities such as in-service training, mentoring, collaborative learning, and self-directed development (Day, 1999; Guskey, 2002). Effective teacher development is closely associated with improvements in teaching quality and student learning outcomes, particularly when it is sustained, context-specific, and aligned with teachers' actual needs.

In many developing countries, teacher development is often constrained by limited resources, insufficient institutional support, and lack of systematic planning. Studies have shown that teachers in rural and mountainous areas tend to have fewer opportunities for professional development and face greater challenges in accessing training programs compared to their urban counterparts (Avalos, 2011). As a result, addressing contextual disparities is essential for designing effective teacher development strategies that are both feasible and sustainable.

2.2. Management of teacher development

The management of teacher development plays a crucial role in ensuring that professional development activities are effectively planned, implemented, and evaluated. From a management perspective, teacher development involves several key functions, including goal setting, planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating development activities (Bush, 2011). These functions must be systematically coordinated to ensure alignment between individual teacher needs and institutional objectives.

Previous research has highlighted that ineffective management practices—such as lack of clear objectives, fragmented planning, and weak monitoring mechanisms—can significantly limit the impact of teacher development initiatives (Fullan, 2007). In contrast, well-structured management systems that promote collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement can enhance both teacher motivation and organizational performance.

2.3. Management by Objectives (MBO) in education

Management by Objectives (MBO), originally proposed by Drucker, is a management approach that emphasizes the importance of clearly defined goals, participatory decision-making, and performance evaluation based on outcomes. MBO has been widely applied in various organizational settings and has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving productivity and employee engagement (Odiorne, 1965).

In educational settings, MBO can be adapted to support teacher development by aligning individual professional goals with broader institutional goals. This approach encourages teachers to actively participate in goal-setting processes, thereby increasing their sense of ownership and responsibility for achieving desired outcomes. Moreover, MBO provides a structured framework for monitoring progress and evaluating performance, which is essential for ensuring accountability in teacher development activities (Armstrong, 2009).

2.4. Research gap and analytical framework

Although the literature has provided substantial insights into teacher development and educational management, there remains a notable gap in integrating goal-based management approaches, such as MBO, into teacher development practices in rural

and mountainous contexts. Most existing studies have either focused on general teacher development or examined management practices without explicitly linking them to a systematic goal-oriented framework.

Furthermore, empirical research on teacher development in disadvantaged regions, particularly in Vietnam, is still limited. The unique socio-economic conditions, cultural diversity, and resource constraints in these areas require context-sensitive management approaches that can address both structural and professional challenges.

To fill this gap, this study adopts the MBO framework to analyze teacher development in primary and lower secondary schools in Thong Nong commune, Cao Bang province. The analytical framework focuses on key components of MBO, including goal setting, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. By examining these components in relation to actual practices, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how teacher development is managed and how it can be improved in similar contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey design to examine teacher development in primary and lower secondary schools in Thong Nong commune, Cao Bang province, Vietnam, from a Management by Objectives (MBO) perspective. The descriptive approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to identify current perceptions, practices, and management activities related to teacher development rather than to test causal relationships. At the same time, the MBO perspective provided an analytical lens for exploring how teacher development was planned, implemented, directed, and evaluated in relation to school goals.

The study was conducted in primary and lower secondary schools located in Thong Nong commune, a mountainous area in Cao Bang province with distinctive socio-economic and educational conditions. The research participants consisted of 149 respondents, including 138 teachers and 11 school managers. Among them, 30 were male and 119 were female. This sample was considered suitable for reflecting both the perspectives of those directly involved in teaching activities and those responsible for school management. The inclusion of both teachers and managers made it possible to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of teacher development practices and the management processes associated with them.

Data were collected mainly through a structured questionnaire designed in accordance with the research objectives and the MBO framework. The questionnaire focused on several key aspects, including participants' perceptions of the importance of teacher development, the current status of teacher competencies, factors affecting teacher development, the implementation of teacher development activities, and management practices related to planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating teacher development. The survey items were organized using response categories appropriate to each group of questions, with emphasis on frequency levels and quality levels in order to capture the respondents' assessments of current practice.

In addition to the questionnaire, the study also drew on document review and contextual analysis to support the interpretation of the survey findings. Relevant educational documents, school reports, and policy orientations related to teacher development were considered in order to ensure that the analysis was grounded in the practical context of local educational management.

The collected data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize the responses and to identify major patterns in the data. This method of analysis was appropriate for the purpose of describing the current situation of teacher development and management practices in the selected schools. Based on the results, the study discussed the extent to which current practices reflected an MBO-oriented approach and identified areas requiring improvement. The findings then served as the basis for proposing practical implications for strengthening teacher development management in rural and mountainous schools.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings of the survey conducted with 149 respondents, including 138 teachers and 11 school managers in primary and lower secondary schools in Thong Nong commune, Cao Bang province. To maintain a concise article structure, only the most representative findings are reported. The selected results focus on four core issues that are directly related to the study title and analytical framework: perceptions of teacher development, the current status of teacher competencies, the implementation of teacher development activities, and management practices viewed from a Management by Objectives (MBO) perspective.

4.1. Perceptions of the importance of teacher development

The survey results show a high level of awareness among respondents regarding the importance of teacher development. A large majority rated teacher development as either very important or important, indicating that both teachers and managers clearly recognized its strategic role in improving educational quality in local schools. Only a very small proportion of respondents considered it less important or unimportant. This finding suggests that the schools have a favorable cognitive foundation for implementing teacher development policies and improvement measures.

Table 1. Perceptions of the importance of teacher development (n = 149)

Perception level	n	%
Very important	95	63.8
Important	45	30.2
Less important	7	4.7
Not important	2	1.3

4.2. Current status of teacher competencies

The results indicate that the teacher workforce was generally assessed at good and very good levels across most competency areas. Professional responsibility and ethics received the most positive ratings, followed by professional qualifications and pedagogical competence. However, ICT competence and the capacity to innovate teaching methods showed lower ratings and higher proportions of average and weak evaluations. These findings imply that teacher development in the study area should continue to prioritize pedagogical renewal and digital competence enhancement, especially under current educational reform requirements.

Table 2. Current status of teacher competencies (n = 149)

Competency area	Very good n (%)	Good n (%)	Average n (%)	Weak n (%)
Professional qualifications	58 (38.9)	54 (36.2)	28 (18.8)	9 (6.0)
Pedagogical competence	52 (34.9)	56 (37.6)	31 (20.8)	10 (6.7)
ICT competence	41 (27.5)	53 (35.6)	39 (26.2)	16 (10.7)
Innovation in teaching methods	45 (30.2)	57 (38.3)	34 (22.8)	13 (8.7)
Professional responsibility and ethics	67 (45.0)	56 (37.6)	20 (13.4)	6 (4.0)

4.3. Implementation of teacher development activities

Teacher development activities were implemented relatively regularly in the surveyed schools, although the level of implementation varied across areas. Professional meetings and subject-based training were the most frequently implemented activities, reflecting the schools' emphasis on routine pedagogical support. In contrast, ICT capacity building and broader career development support were assessed less favorably, with a larger share of responses in the occasional or non-implementation categories. This result is consistent with the competency findings above and suggests that teacher development remained stronger in traditional professional support than in technology-related and long-term developmental dimensions.

Table 3. Implementation of teacher development activities (n = 149)

Activity	Very frequent n (%)	Frequent n (%)	Occasional n (%)	Not implemented n (%)
Professional training for teachers	63 (42.3)	50 (33.6)	26 (17.4)	10 (6.7)
Training on innovative teaching methods	57 (38.3)	54 (36.2)	28 (18.8)	10 (6.7)
ICT capacity building	44 (29.5)	51 (34.2)	38 (25.5)	16 (10.7)
Professional meetings	69 (46.3)	49 (32.9)	23 (15.4)	8 (5.4)
Career development support	51 (34.2)	55 (36.9)	31 (20.8)	12 (8.1)

4.4. Management practices from a Management by Objectives perspective

From an MBO perspective, the management of teacher development in the surveyed schools can be described as moderately positive but not yet fully systematic. Planning-related activities were generally evaluated at good and fairly good levels, especially in relation to professional training plans. Organizational implementation and direction also received mostly positive ratings, particularly in task assignment and professional guidance. Nevertheless, several dimensions remained weaker, including advanced qualification planning, coordination among forces, follow-up support, and the direction of teacher evaluation. These findings

indicate that teacher development management has established a functional basis, but it still needs stronger goal alignment, closer monitoring, and more consistent feedback mechanisms to fully reflect an MBO-oriented approach.

Table 4. MBO-based management practices in teacher development (n = 149)

Management practice	Good n (%)	Fairly good n (%)	Average n (%)	Weak n (%)
Developing teacher development plans	54 (36.2)	57 (38.3)	27 (18.1)	11 (7.4)
Planning professional training	59 (39.6)	55 (36.9)	25 (16.8)	10 (6.7)
Planning pedagogical competence improvement	51 (34.2)	58 (38.9)	28 (18.8)	12 (8.1)
Planning advanced qualification upgrading	43 (28.9)	52 (34.9)	35 (23.5)	19 (12.8)
Clear task assignment	57 (38.3)	56 (37.6)	25 (16.8)	11 (7.4)
Providing opportunities for study and training	52 (34.9)	58 (38.9)	27 (18.1)	12 (8.1)
Coordination among stakeholders	45 (30.2)	57 (38.3)	31 (20.8)	16 (10.7)
Monitoring and support for teachers	48 (32.2)	56 (37.6)	31 (20.8)	14 (9.4)
Directing professional training	58 (38.9)	55 (36.9)	25 (16.8)	11 (7.4)
Directing innovation in teaching methods	52 (34.9)	57 (38.3)	28 (18.8)	12 (8.1)
Directing teacher competence evaluation	46 (30.9)	55 (36.9)	33 (22.1)	15 (10.1)

Overall discussion

Overall, the findings reveal that teacher development in primary and lower secondary schools in Thong Nong commune was regarded as highly important and was supported by a number of ongoing professional activities. At the same time, the results point to specific areas that require stronger managerial attention, particularly ICT-related competence, qualification upgrading, inter-stakeholder coordination, and evaluation-oriented follow-up. These patterns support the relevance of using MBO as an analytical and practical framework, because a stronger focus on shared goals, planned implementation, and outcome-based monitoring may help schools improve the effectiveness and coherence of teacher development in a disadvantaged mountainous context.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined teacher development in primary and lower secondary schools in Thong Nong commune, Cao Bang province, Vietnam, from a Management by Objectives perspective. The findings indicate that teachers and school managers showed a high level of awareness of the importance of teacher development. At the same time, the current status of the teaching workforce reflected several positive features, particularly in professional responsibility, pedagogical competence, and professional qualifications. However, some aspects, especially ICT competence, teaching innovation, and the systematic implementation of development activities, remained uneven and required further improvement.

The study also revealed that teacher development activities had been implemented in the surveyed schools through professional training, pedagogical meetings, and support for career development. Nevertheless, management practices were still stronger in general planning and direction than in continuous monitoring, coordination, and outcome-based evaluation. From this perspective, Management by Objectives appears to be an appropriate framework for strengthening teacher development in rural and mountainous schools, as it can support clearer goal setting, better alignment between individual and institutional development, and more systematic follow-up of results. These findings suggest that improving teacher development in disadvantaged contexts requires not only professional support for teachers but also stronger management mechanisms grounded in clearly defined objectives and continuous evaluation.

Although the study was limited to a specific local context and mainly used descriptive survey data, it provides useful implications for educational management in similar rural and mountainous areas of Vietnam.

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