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## Teaching Staff at District-level Continuing Education Centers in Son La province, Vietnam: Qualities and Professional Development

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### Abstract

*This study examines the status of teachers at district-level continuing education centers in Son La province, Vietnam. Continuing education centers play a critical role in promoting lifelong learning and addressing the educational needs of local communities, especially in rural and remote areas like Son La. However, these centers face challenges related to teacher quality, resources, and professional development. The analysis highlights that many teachers lack adequate professional training, face difficult working conditions, and have limited access to modern teaching resources. Furthermore, teacher recruitment and retention are hindered by low salaries, and limited career advancement opportunities. Despite these obstacles, the centers remain vital to the educational development of the province, contributing to literacy, vocational training, and skill development. Recommendations for improving teacher status include increased investment in training, better working conditions, and enhanced policy support for career development, and insights for policymakers and education stakeholders aiming to improve the quality and effectiveness of continuing education in Son La.*

**Keywords:** staff development, teaching staff, continuing education, professional standards

### Introduction

The general structure of education in a learning society is a system of educational institutions. These institutions are divided into two

types: Formal Education and Non-formal Education. Formal education forms the initial education system and the continuing

education system. The initial education system includes formal education from nurseries, kindergartens, primary schools, junior high schools, high schools to vocational schools at all levels, vocational training centers, vocational secondary schools, colleges and universities. The non-formal education system is very diverse in terms of types of schools and institutions with educational functions such as cultural supplementary schools, continuing education centers, community learning centers, private facilities for children with disabilities, vocational training classes associated with production facilities, private vocational training classes, cultural houses, clubs, communal cultural post offices, etc. These are the reasons why continuing education has been more important than ever that can be seen in the laws (The National Assembly, 2019), (The Prime Minister, 2021) and in the varied academic publications in different sectors.

That are the current status , challenges , and strategies of continuing professional development for graduates of rural bonded general practitioner education program (Pu et al., 2024), self-regulated learning strategies in continuing education (Hemmler & Ifenthaler, 2024), Teachers ' reflections on enhancing distance education ( DE ) provision (Abakah et al., 2023). There are some marked studies relevant to the health such as Continuing Professional Development Activities Provided by Continuing Pharmacy Education Providers (Murry et al., 2024), A continuing education program and participatory study offered to arts therapists working in the Israeli education system (Sharon et al., 2024), Nurse Education Today (Ryder & Browne, 2024), motivation for continuing education in nursing (Tsirigoti et al., 2024), A major issue in promoting health in school environment (Lenoir et al., 2024).

Son La province, located in the mountainous northwest of Vietnam, is home to diverse ethnic groups and distinct socio-economic conditions. The province faces numerous educational challenges, particularly in remote and rural areas. Continuing education centers (CECs) at the district level play a vital role in improving the educational attainment of adults and out-of-school youth, addressing the needs of ethnic minorities, and contributing to community development. However, the status of teachers at these centers remains a critical issue that affects the quality and accessibility of education in this region.

### **Educational Context of Son La Province**

Son La is a relatively underdeveloped province compared to the national average in Vietnam, with a majority of its population belonging to ethnic minorities such as the Thai, Hmong, and Muong groups. These communities face several barriers to formal education, including geographical isolation, language differences, and limited economic opportunities (World Bank, 2017). Continuing education centers, therefore, serve as an essential bridge in addressing educational gaps, offering programs like literacy classes, vocational training, and adult education for local populations.

### **Role of District-Level Continuing Education Centers**

District-level CECs in Son La, as elsewhere in Vietnam, function under the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) guidelines and aim to provide non-formal education services that are flexible, accessible, and suited to local needs. These centers typically cater to adults who did not complete their formal education and offer a variety of programs, from basic literacy to skill development for employability (MOET, 2018). In Son La, these centers are tasked with delivering education to some of the most vulnerable

populations in the country. However, their capacity to fulfill this mission is significantly affected by the quality of teachers working in these centers. The teachers are responsible for not only imparting knowledge but also creating culturally relevant curricula and fostering an inclusive learning environment.

### **Teacher Qualifications and Training**

The qualifications and training of teachers in district-level CECs in Son La have been identified as a major concern. According to several studies, teachers in these centers often lack formal training specific to adult education, pedagogical skills for diverse learning environments, and familiarity with modern teaching methods (Nguyen & Tran, 2019). Many teachers hold degrees in general education but have not received the specialized training required for the continuing education model, which focuses on adult learners and vocational training. In remote provinces like Son La, where access to professional development opportunities is limited, teachers face additional challenges in upgrading their skills. A report by the Ministry of Education and Training (2019) highlighted that professional development programs for teachers in CECs are irregular, often outdated, and do not fully address the unique needs of adult education in rural areas.

### **Working Conditions and Teacher Motivation**

Working conditions for teachers at CECs in Son La are also a significant issue. Studies have shown that teachers at these centers typically work with limited resources, such as outdated textbooks, insufficient teaching materials, and inadequate infrastructure (Nguyen, 2020). These factors are exacerbated by the fact that district-level centers often receive less funding compared to mainstream schools, leading to lower salaries and limited career advancement opportunities for teachers. The low remuneration and lack of clear career pathways have been identified as key factors leading to low teacher motivation and high turnover rates (Hoang, 2021). Teachers are often tasked with multiple roles, including administrative duties, which further strain their ability to focus on improving teaching quality. This situation creates a cycle where low teacher motivation impacts the quality of education, which in turn affects student outcomes and the overall success of the continuing education model.

### **Need for Policy Support and Reforms**

Addressing the status of teachers at district-level CECs in Son La requires comprehensive policy reforms. Experts have suggested several solutions, including increasing investment in teacher training programs that focus on adult education pedagogy, improving teacher recruitment strategies, and ensuring equitable salary structures and career development opportunities (Nguyen & Hoang, 2021). Additionally, the integration of digital technologies in teacher training could offer teachers access to resources and training opportunities that are otherwise unavailable in remote areas (MOET, 2020). In 2020, the Vietnamese government launched a national program to improve education in ethnic minority and mountainous regions, which includes a focus on continuing education. This program highlights the importance of enhancing teacher quality at district-level CECs and providing them with the support they need to improve the delivery of education services (MOET, 2020).

### **Methods and Procedures**

The participants are managers and teachers of 7/11 District-level Continuing Education Centers, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province , including: Bac Yen, Phu Yen, Thuan Chau, Quynh Nhai, Muong La, Song Ma, Van Ho; Thuan

Chau (Total number of survey respondents is 120 people, including Director, Deputy Director, Head of professional group and teachers). Survey focuses on analyzing the general characteristics of teachers in terms of quantity, quality, and structure of teachers and focusing on surveying the current situation of teachers' standards according to professional standards including teacher qualities; professional development; building an educational environment; developing relationships between schools, families and society and using foreign languages or ethnic languages and applying information technology, exploiting and using technology equipment in teaching and education.

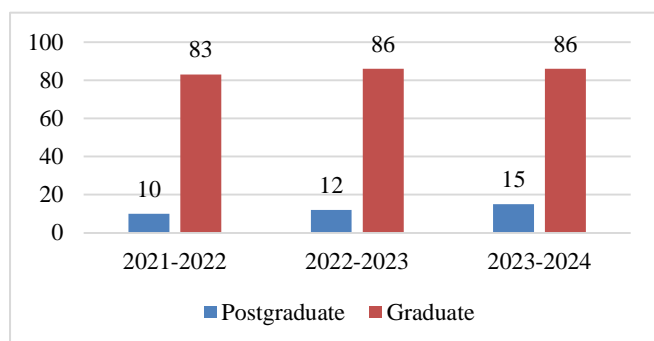
## Results and Discussion

Based on statistics on the quality of the teaching staff and of assessing the professional standards of high school teachers by management staff through data sources, in order to make comments, analyze, evaluate the current situation and measures to manage and develop the teaching staff at the district-level continuing education centers Son La province according to professional standards. By doing that to provide some recommendations and draw some conclusions regarding the context of the mountainous province in terms of policy that can meet the professional standards of high school teachers regulated by the state legal.

### Number and Qualifications

Figure 1

Number and Education



In recent years, the Department of Education and Training of Son La province has focused on developing the staff of managers, teachers and staff at district-level continuing education centers in terms of quantity, professional quality and capacity. In the past 3 years (2021 - 2023), the number of managers, teachers and staff at district-level continuing education centers in the province has increased every year.

In terms of quantity, the Figure 1 shows that in recent years, with the attention and direction of the Party Committee and People's Committee of Son La province, as well as the increase of district-level continuing education centers, the number of teachers of district-level continuing education centers, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, has grown in number, specifically in the school year (2021-2022), the whole province had 93 teachers, this number increased to 98 teachers in the school year (2022-2023) and the number of teachers in the school year (2023-2024) was 101 people. The growth in the number of teachers of district-level continuing education centers in Son La province, although not much, reflects the increase in district-level continuing education centers in the province.

Regarding to quality, the Figure 1 shows that the quality of teachers at district-level continuing education centers in Son La

province is increasingly improved with 100% of teachers meeting the standards required for teachers in the high schools, the rate of teachers exceeding the standards increases every year, if in the 2021-2022 school year, 10.8% of teachers at continuing education centers had postgraduate qualifications; by the 2022-2023 school year, this rate increased to 12.2% and in the 2023-2024 school year, the number of teachers with postgraduate qualifications increased to 14.9%. This information shows that in recent years, the quality of teachers at district-level continuing education centers under the Provincial Department of Education and Training of Son La province has been significantly improved, this is a great advantage to help improve the quality of education at continuing education centers in the province.

Table 1 Gender and ages

	Target	N	%
	<b>Total number of teachers</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>
I	<i>Gender structure</i>		
1	Male	42	41.5
2	Female	59	58.42
II	<i>Ages</i>		
1	> 50	8	7.92
2	41 - 50	22	21.78
3	31 - 40	56	55.45
4	<30	15	14.85

Source: Department of Education and Training of Son La province, 2024

The survey results in Table 1 show that the structure of teachers at district-level continuing education centers, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, by age is as follows: the number of teachers aged 31 to 40 years old accounts for the highest proportion with 56 people, accounting for 55.45%. These staff is a force that has solid expertise, accumulated a lot of experience in professional activities, and is the most important force in ensuring the quality of education at the centers. The number of teachers under 30 years old is 14.85%, this is the age of enthusiasm, very healthy and also the age of always eager to learn, explore, discover to conquer the peak of intelligence and want to affirm their position in the profession and expertise - that is a great advantage to improve the quality of continuing education at the district level in the area. The number of teachers over 50 years old in the district is not large, accounting for only 7.92%. With such an age, every year, the district-level continuing education center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, has about 8 teachers at retirement age. These are teachers with a lot of experience in teaching and education, dedicated to their profession, and are important factors influencing the quality of education at each center. Therefore, the Board of Directors of the centers should have a plan to use them appropriately, so that they can share their professional experience with young teachers. At the same time, it is necessary to have the necessary forecast to recruit and supplement human resources for the district-level Continuing Education Centers in the province appropriately. Regarding gender: according to statistics, the proportion of teachers in continuing education centers in Son La province is currently 58.42%; male is 41.58%.

## Teacher Qualities

*Table 2 Teacher qualities*

Content	Level performance							
	4		3		2		1	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Strictly implement regulations on teacher ethics	90	75.0	30	25.0	0	0.00	0	0
Have the spirit of self-study, self-training and strive to improve the moral qualities of teachers	85	70.8	30	25.0	5	4.17	0	0
Be a role model of teacher ethics; share experiences and support colleagues in practicing teacher ethics.	67	55.8	46	38.3	7	5.83	0	0
Have a working style and method suitable for the work of a teacher at a vocational training center	89	74.1	31	25.8	0	0.00	0	0
Have the awareness to self-train to create exemplary teaching style; good influence on students.	83	69.1	35	29.1	2	1.67	0	0
Be a role model in teaching style; positively influence and support colleagues in forming teaching style.	66	55.0	45	37.5	9	7.50	0	0

According to the new regulations of teachers, the qualities of teachers are divided into two aspects: teacher ethics and teacher style. In reality, what society values and demands most from teachers is the ability to educate students, which means that teachers must fully possess the two most important factors: ability and qualities, which are two factors that are closely related and inseparable. At any historical period, at any level of education, the qualities of teachers are always "examples" for students. The survey results in Table 2 show that: most teachers at district-level continuing education centers under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province meet the requirements on teacher ethics and teaching style, specifically as follows:

- Regarding the strict implementation of regulations on teachers' ethics, up to 75% of the surveyed people said that the Party Committee of the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, achieved the Good level; 25% achieved the Fair level and no teachers were assessed as Achieved or Not Achieved. This survey result shows that the Party Committee of the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, always strictly follow the Party's guidelines and policies, the State's policies and laws, as well as the regulations issued by the Ministry of Education and Training, and always comply with the regulations on teachers' ethics.
- The majority of teachers at the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, have the spirit of self-study, self-training, and striving to improve the moral qualities of teachers. Conducting a survey on this criterion, we received 70.83% of opinions that the teachers at the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, have done this well; 25% of the surveyed people rated it as Fair and 4.17% rated it as Achieved; no teachers were rated as Unsatisfactory. This result shows that the majority of teachers at the district-level Continuing Education Center are conscious of self-studying and self-training their professional moral qualities, worthy of the honor that society gives them, when carrying out the noble responsibility of "people development".
- When surveyed about the content of "being a model of teacher ethics; sharing experiences, supporting colleagues in training teacher ethics", we received 55.83% of the surveyed opinions that they have done well; 38.33% said that they only did this at a fair level and 5.38% rated the implementation level at the level of Achieved; no teacher was rated as not achieved. To improve the quality of teachers, supporting and helping colleagues to progress together is a very important factor, with the above survey rate showing that this is a limitation that needs to be overcome in the coming time.
- 74.17% of the surveyed people rated it as Good with the criteria of having a working style and method suitable for the work of a teacher at a continuing education center; 25.83% rated it as Fair and the good news is that there is no Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory level for this criterion. This is a success in the process of developing teachers of the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, showing that teachers at the district-level continuing education center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, have a standard working style.
- With the criterion "Being aware of self-training to create an exemplary teaching style; having a good influence on students", 69.17% of the surveyed people assessed that the teachers of the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, performed this well; 29.17% assessed the performance at the Fair level and 1.67% at the Achieved level; no teachers were assessed at the Unsatisfactory level.
- The criterion "Being a role model in teaching style; having a good influence and supporting colleagues in forming teaching style" was evaluated at Good level by 55% of opinions; 37.5% at Fair level and 7.5% at Achieved level; no teacher was evaluated at Unsatisfactory level.

## Professional Development

Table 3 Professional development

Content	Level performance							
	4		3		2		1	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Personal professional development	88	73.3	32	26.6	0	0.00	0	0.00
Building a training and education plan towards developing students' qualities and abilities	85	70.8	30	25.0	5	4.17	0	0.00
Using teaching methods and education towards developing students' qualities and abilities	78	65.0	29	24.1	13	10.8	0	0.00
Test and evaluate in the direction of developing students' qualities and abilities.	73	60.8	32	26.6	15	12.5	0	0.00
Student Consulting and Support	61	50.8	41	34.1	18	15.00	0	0.00

The survey results in Table 3 show that, in the past time, the teachers of the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, have done relatively well in developing their expertise and skills. The pedagogical capacity of most teachers of the district-level Continuing Education Centers of Son La province is quite good, initially approaching the requirements of innovating teaching content and methods towards developing students' qualities and abilities. The majority of teachers self-study and self-train to improve their professional qualifications and pedagogical skills to improve the quality of teaching. The teachers of the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, initially meet the requirements and contents of innovating teaching methods. The results of student education are increasingly improved to meet the increasingly high requirements of education. Creating the trust of many parents and local leaders. This is partly demonstrated through the results of a survey on the professional development of teachers at district-level Continuing Education Centers under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province that the author conducted. Through the survey results, table 3 shows that:

- Regarding the work of personal professional development, the majority of teachers pay great attention. With this criterion, when conducting the survey, we received 73.33 % of opinions assessing the level of implementation as Good; 26.67 % assessed at the level of Fair and no opinions assessed at the level of Achieved or Not achieved. This shows that the teachers of the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, always actively train themselves to meet the training standards and fully complete the training courses, foster professional knowledge according to regulations; have a plan to regularly study, foster and develop their own professional skills. The majority of teachers of the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, have a proactive spirit of research, promptly update the requirements for innovation in professional knowledge; creatively and appropriately apply forms, methods and choose the content of study, foster and improve their professional capacity. Besides, he is also very enthusiastic in guiding and supporting colleagues and sharing experiences in his own professional development to meet the requirements of educational innovation.

- Regarding the content of planning teaching and education towards developing the qualities and abilities of learners, teachers are also very interested and implemented quite seriously. Surveying 120 people including managers and teachers of centers and district-level continuing education in Son La province, we found that 70.83 % of them rated it as Good; 25 % rated it as Fair and 4.17 % rated it as Achieved and no opinions rated it as Unachieved. The results of this survey show that although the majority of teachers are very aware and have done well in planning teaching and education towards developing learners' abilities, they know how to adjust the plan to suit the actual conditions of the locality and learners. However, there are still some teachers who have not done this job well, the planning work is still sketchy, leading to lack of proficiency when starting to educate learners.
- Regarding the use of teaching and education methods towards developing students' qualities and abilities, teachers also District-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province implemented quite well. Most of the District-level Continuing Education centers have applied teaching and education methods to develop the qualities and abilities of students. Actively update, flexibly and effectively apply teaching and education methods to meet the requirements of innovation, suitable for practical conditions. In addition, teachers are also very active in guiding and supporting colleagues in knowledge, skills and experience in applying teaching and education methods towards developing the qualities and abilities of students. This is clearly reflected in the survey results, with 65 % of the respondents rating this criterion as Good; 24.17 % rated it as Not good and 10.83 % rated it as Achieved; no opinion rated it as Not achieved.
- The content of testing and evaluating in the direction of developing students' qualities and abilities is also implemented at district-level Continuing Education Centers under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province. When conducting a survey on this content, we received 60.83 % of the surveyed people rated it at the Good level; 26.67 % rated it at the Not good level; 12.5 % rated it at the Achieved level; no comments rated it at the Unachieved level. This shows that in the process of using testing methods to evaluate learning outcomes and progress of students, teachers still encounter many confusions; as well as

not really proactively updating and creatively applying forms, methods, and tools of testing and evaluation in the direction of developing students' qualities and abilities. The guidance and support of experienced colleagues to effectively implement testing and evaluating learning outcomes and progress of students has been implemented but not well.

- Regarding the content of consulting and supporting students. Teachers of district-level Continuing Education Centers, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province implement this quite seriously, however, the implementation process is not good, only 50.83 % of the surveyed people rated this content as Good; 34.17 % rated it as Fair and 15 % said it was at the level of Achieved; no opinion rated it as not achieved. Most teachers understand students and have a good grasp of regulations on counseling and supporting students; integrate counseling and supporting activities into teaching and educational activities. However, counseling and supporting measures are sometimes not appropriate, especially for individual cases.

## Conclusion

Teachers in general and teachers of Continuing Education Centers in particular, are a special human resource in education and training. Teachers have a special function and task of receiving and imparting knowledge to students, building and creating human resources for the future. Therefore, in all periods, teachers are always highly appreciated by the State and society and also require high capacity and quality. The district-level Continuing Education Center's teaching staff is an important factor in building the Continuing Education Center into a continuing education facility of the national education system, creating basic conditions to improve people's knowledge and equipping the initial foundations for comprehensive development of human personality in the future. The district-level Continuing Education Center's teaching staff teaching continuing education programs at the junior high school level and continuing education programs at the high school level must meet the standard training level and professional title standards as prescribed by the general education teachers corresponding to each level of education.

According to the survey results of the quality of teachers of the district-level Continuing Education Center, under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province, in general, the majority of teachers have the quality of teachers, which is highly appreciated.

Along with general education, the district-level Continuing Education Centers under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province have made remarkable progress in recent years, especially in the work of building, developing, managing and training teachers. Faced with the increasingly high demands on human resources of the economic and social innovation, and the requirements and tasks of current and future education, the management and development of teachers at the district-level Continuing Education Centers under the Department of Education and Training of Son La province has gradually met the requirements of high school teachers in the process of ensuring quality and effectiveness of training. The issue of developing teachers at district-level Continuing Education Centers to meet the requirements of high school teachers has been studied by a number of authors and provided with basic principles and theories as a basis and creating conditions for managers to have a

comprehensive view. However, how to apply it effectively in each educational institution depends on the specific characteristics of each locality.

## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was reported by all authors.

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