

Teaching Motivation in Vietnam's Public Schools: Lessons from Tien Duoc Secondary School, Soc Son, Hanoi

Abstract

Teacher motivation is a cornerstone of educational quality and institutional success. In Vietnam's public education system, educators face a range of structural, economic, and cultural challenges that impact their professional engagement. This study investigates the current state of teacher motivation at Tien Duoc Secondary School in Hanoi, employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates survey data and qualitative interviews. The findings reveal both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing motivation, including salary, leadership, professional development, and working conditions. Drawing on established motivational theories and contextual realities, the paper proposes a multidimensional strategy to foster long-term engagement and instructional effectiveness. The study concludes with policy recommendations for both institutional and governmental stakeholders, aiming to enhance teacher motivation and improve educational outcomes.

This research was conducted in 2018, but its relevance remains intact, so the authors confidently to introduce.

Keywords: teacher motivation, secondary education, Vietnam, Herzberg theory, Maslow hierarchy, educational policy, qualitative research

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of national development. In Vietnam, the government has consistently prioritized education as a strategic sector, investing in infrastructure, curriculum reform, and teacher training. Despite these efforts, challenges persist in maintaining high-quality teaching and retaining skilled educators, particularly at the secondary level. Teacher motivation is central to addressing these challenges, as it directly influences instructional quality, student outcomes, and institutional stability.

Motivated teachers are more likely to innovate, engage students effectively, and remain committed to their profession. Conversely, low motivation can lead to absenteeism, reduced performance, and high turnover rates. This study explores the dynamics of teaching motivation through a case study of Tien Duoc Secondary School, located in Soc Son District, Hanoi. The school reflects many of the systemic issues facing Vietnam's public education sector, including limited resources, bureaucratic constraints, and evolving societal expectations.

The research aims to assess current levels of teacher motivation, identify influencing factors, and propose actionable strategies to enhance motivation. By integrating theoretical insights with empirical data, the study contributes to the broader discourse on educational reform and teacher well-being in Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Motivation in Education

Motivation is defined as the internal drive that compels individuals to act in pursuit of specific goals. In educational settings, teaching motivation refers to a teacher's enthusiasm, commitment, and persistence in delivering instruction. It encompasses both intrinsic elements, such as a passion for teaching and a sense of professional identity, and extrinsic factors, including salary, recognition, and working conditions.

Research has shown that motivated teachers are more likely to adopt student-centered pedagogies, engage in continuous professional development, and contribute to school improvement initiatives. Conversely, demotivated teachers may exhibit resistance to change, reduced instructional quality, and disengagement from institutional goals.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

This study draws upon five classical theories of motivation to frame its analysis. (1) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs posits that individuals are motivated by a progression of needs, beginning with physiological and safety needs and culminating in self-actualization; (2) Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction (e.g., salary, working conditions), and motivators, which enhance satisfaction (e.g., achievement, recognition); (3) Adams' Equity Theory emphasizes the role of perceived fairness in reward distribution, suggesting that individuals compare their inputs and outcomes with those of others; (4) Vroom's Expectancy Theory proposes that motivation is a function of expectancy (belief that effort leads to performance), instrumentality (belief that performance leads to outcomes), and valence (value of the outcomes); (5) Locke's Goal-Setting Theory highlights the motivational benefits of setting specific, challenging, and attainable goals.

2.3 Teacher Motivation in Vietnam

Vietnamese educators operate within a complex landscape shaped by cultural expectations, economic constraints, and institutional limitations. While teaching is traditionally respected, the profession is often undervalued in terms of compensation and career advancement. Studies have shown that intrinsic motivation remains relatively strong among Vietnamese teachers, driven by a sense of duty and commitment to students. However, systemic issues such as low salaries, limited autonomy, and bureaucratic burdens diminish overall motivation.

Nguyen (2016) notes that many teachers in Vietnam experience professional stagnation due to rigid promotion structures and lack of recognition. Thiem (2005) highlights the contrast with South Korea, where teachers enjoy high social status and clear career pathways. These insights underscore the need for context-sensitive strategies to enhance teacher motivation in Vietnam.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To capture the multifaceted nature of teacher motivation, this study employed a mixed-methods research design. The approach combined quantitative survey analysis with qualitative semi-

structured interviews, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of both statistical trends and personal experiences.

3.2 Participants and Instruments

The study involved 53 teachers from Tien Duoc Lower Secondary School. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire comprising 35 Likert-scale items designed to measure various dimensions of motivation, including job satisfaction, leadership, professional development, and working conditions. In addition, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with selected teachers and school administrators to gain deeper insights into the contextual factors influencing motivation.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation techniques to identify patterns and correlations. Qualitative data were coded thematically, enabling the identification of recurring themes and nuanced perspectives that complemented the survey findings. The integration of both data types provided a robust foundation for interpreting the results and formulating recommendations.

4. Findings

4.1 Levels of Motivation

Survey results indicated that most teachers at Tien Duoc Lower Secondary School exhibited moderate to high levels of motivation. Teachers expressed satisfaction with aspects such as recognition for their work, clarity of responsibilities, and collegial relationships. These factors contributed positively to their sense of professional fulfillment.

However, significant dissatisfaction was reported in relation to salary, opportunities for advancement, and access to teaching materials. Over 40 percent of respondents stated that their income was insufficient, often requiring them to seek additional employment. This financial strain was identified as a major source of stress and demotivation.

4.2 Influencing Factors

Leadership practices emerged as a critical determinant of motivation. Teachers described communication with school administrators as inconsistent and lacking responsiveness. Many felt that their feedback was not adequately considered in decision-making processes, leading to feelings of marginalization.

Professional development opportunities were available but often perceived as misaligned with classroom realities. Teachers expressed a desire for more practical, context-specific training that addressed their immediate instructional needs.

Working conditions, including infrastructure and peer support, were generally viewed positively. Teachers appreciated the collaborative environment and the availability of basic teaching resources, although they noted the need for more updated materials and technology.

4.3 Challenges Identified

Seven core challenges were identified through the analysis. These included the absence of a needs-based teacher assessment system, inadequacies in salary and benefits, limited availability of teaching and reference materials, superficial performance evaluations, lack of incentives for research activities, subjective approaches to professional development planning, and weak feedback mechanisms from school leadership.

5. Discussion

The findings reinforce the applicability of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory in the Vietnamese context. Hygiene factors such as salary, working conditions, and administrative support must be stabilized before motivational factors like recognition and achievement can have a meaningful impact. The dissatisfaction expressed by teachers regarding compensation and leadership practices suggests that foundational needs are not being met, thereby limiting the effectiveness of intrinsic motivators.

Comparative analysis with South Korea reveals important insights. In South Korea, teachers benefit from high social respect, competitive salaries, and structured career progression. These factors contribute to sustained motivation and professional engagement. In contrast, Vietnamese educators face greater uncertainty and undervaluation, despite similar cultural emphasis on education. This disparity highlights the importance of systemic support in fostering teacher motivation.

To address these issues, schools must integrate principles from expectancy theory and goal-setting theory into their operational frameworks. Goals should be collaboratively defined with teachers, ensuring clarity and relevance. Progress should be regularly monitored, and achievements should be publicly recognized to reinforce positive behavior and commitment.

6. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Enhancing teacher motivation requires coordinated efforts at both the institutional and governmental levels. At the school level, regular surveys should be conducted to assess teacher needs and expectations. Evaluation mechanisms must be redesigned to incorporate feedback from peers and students, promoting transparency and fairness. School leaders should receive training in emotional intelligence and participatory governance to improve communication and responsiveness. Establishing clear career pathways and merit-based promotion opportunities can significantly boost motivation.

At the national level, a comprehensive review of teacher salary scales is necessary to ensure competitive compensation that reflects the demands of the profession. Increased funding should be allocated for professional development programs that are directly linked to classroom competencies. Additionally, the creation of a national database of best practices in teacher motivation would facilitate knowledge sharing and policy innovation across educational institutions.

7. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into teacher motivation at a specific secondary school, its findings may not be generalizable to all educational contexts in Vietnam. The sample size, though adequate for a case study, limits broader applicability. Future research should consider longitudinal studies across multiple regions to capture variations in motivation over time and space. Moreover, incorporating student perspectives could enrich understanding of how teacher motivation affects learning outcomes.

8. Conclusion

Motivating teachers in Vietnam's secondary schools is a complex and multifaceted challenge that demands both contextual sensitivity and strategic innovation. This study offers empirical evidence and theoretical grounding to inform policy and practice aimed at improving teacher motivation. By addressing systemic deficiencies and reinforcing intrinsic motivators, educational institutions can cultivate a culture of commitment, creativity, and excellence.

Such efforts not only enhance the professional satisfaction and retention of teachers but also contribute to improved student outcomes and overall educational quality. Sustainable motivation strategies must be embedded within institutional frameworks and supported by national policies that recognize the evolving needs of educators. As Vietnam continues to reform its education system, prioritizing teacher motivation will be essential for building a resilient, equitable, and forward-looking learning environment.

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