

# DIFFICULTIES FACING NOVICE TEACHER-RESEARCHERS IN TERMS OF WORKING CONDITIONS AND THE SUPPORT THEY NEED

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**Abstract:** The present study explores the difficulties that novice lecturers at one faculty in a university in Hanoi might face in conducting research as part of their job, especially those related to working conditions and further support they might need in this practice. The study used qualitative method of interview with six novice teachers. The outcomes show that the working conditions received mixed responses, with positive ones towards the availability of facilities/resources, information about research opportunities and negative ones towards research pressure, lack of time and lack of mentoring from experienced colleagues. Further support was then called for in the form of more financial aids and personal mentoring as well as reconsideration in research requirements on novice teachers by the school.

*Keywords:* teacher's professional development, teacher's research, teacher's working conditions

## 1. Introduction

This study is a follow-up of one previous study that I conducted on six novice English teachers' confidence level and motivations in doing research (Lan, 2020). As a novice teacher struggling with research requirements myself, I become curious as to whether other novice teachers have been facing the same problem. That is the main reason why I decided to do research into the research practice of novice teachers at one university Faculty. In my previous study, it has been found that the six participant novice teachers had medium to low level of confidence in doing research with certain negative emotions towards research doing. These teachers oriented towards extrinsic motivations such as requirements by the school despite acknowledging the positive impacts research might have on their teaching practice. Exploring the same novice teachers' research

practice, I conducted one further study into the difficulties these teachers might face and the support they need to improve the quality of their research practice. The two research questions for this study are:

Research question 1: What difficulties in terms of working conditions do the novice teachers face in conducting research?

Research question 2: What support do novice teachers need to conduct their research more effectively?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Teacher-Researcher

Teachers' ability to conduct research in order to understand the complexity of their working environment and reflect on their teaching practice is considered an important competence that teachers, especially university teachers, must possess. Teachers are no longer

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expected to be an inactive stakeholder in educational reforms, but they must take on the role of reflective practitioner and collaborative member of the educational community of inquiry (Hammersley, 1993; Gray & Campbell-Evans, 2002). Studies have reached the general consensus that teachers who read and do research on a regular basis make research-based pedagogical decisions which in turn positively benefit both teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 2001; Kincheloe, 2003; Lyle, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Kirkwood & Christie, 2006; Chow et al., 2015).

### **2.2. Research Requirements at the University**

The chosen university in this study is one of the leading universities in the country and is stepping up its efforts to raise its status on the educational scene of Asia. Accordingly, the university has an ambitious goal of entering the top 100 universities in Asia and top 500 universities in the world by the year 2020. With an aim to create its trademark as a research institution, the university and its member universities have required that any in-service teacher must conduct more than 600 hours of research per year. Nevertheless, as for a number of teachers, especially novice teachers with limited experience in both teaching and researching, this requirement could pose a great challenge.

### **2.3. Novice Teachers and Their Difficulties**

The first years of novice teachers have always been a topic of great concern. Studies generally show that novice teachers – or teachers with less than five years of experience on the job encounter enormous challenges in the induction period of their career. These include classroom management struggles, unsupported working environments, inadequate preparation time, lack of administrative support (Dickson et al., 2014). Generally speaking, studies into difficulties faced by novice teachers have focused on their role in instructional or class-room based activities only. Meanwhile, novice university teachers are also required to conduct research but may encounter great difficulties due to a lack of experience and orientation in such a complicated and highly demanding academic practice (Keyes, 2000).

### **2.4. Working Conditions and Their Effects on Research Activities**

Working condition has been found to be a significant factor influencing teacher's attitude, commitment, retention as well as the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Weiss, 1999; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Leithwood, Lewis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Ladd, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Working conditions for teachers include a variety of aspects such as facilities, resources, workload, out-of-classroom duties, pay, compensation, leadership, administrative support for professional development, teacher participation in decision making, autonomy, opportunities of collaboration, planning time with colleagues, school safety, school orderliness, student readiness to learn, and public respect for teachers (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Smith, 1996; Jacobson, 2005; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007).

For teacher-researchers, working conditions can also greatly affect the quality of their research practice. Borg (2006) presented 10 conditions that affect teacher research, namely

- i. Awareness
- ii. Motivation
- iii. Knowledge and skills
- iv. Choice
- v. Mentoring
- vi. Time
- vii. Recognition
- viii. Expectations
- ix. Community
- x. Dissemination potential. (p. 23)

These ten conditions seem to encompass both internal factors (awareness, motivation, knowledge, skills, choice, expectations) and external factors (time, recognition, community). For this current study, basing mainly on the works of Leithwood and McAdie of Canadian Education Association (2007) and Smith (2016) at U.S. Department of Education, I choose to look into working conditions or external conditions that have an impact on teacher research practice. I come to see these working conditions as a combination of

- i. physical factors such as availability of information, facilities, material, resources, financial support,

- ii. non-physical factors such as workload, time, school/authority support for teachers, relationships and support among colleagues.

That teacher-researchers are restricted by constraints of working conditions is well documented in literature. An early study published on the *British Journal of In-service Education* by Hancock (1997) found that teachers' reluctance to assume the role of researcher stemmed from four major difficulties including their professional status as merely knowledge provider and instructor rather than teacher-researcher; their unsupportive working conditions; their lack of confidence; and problems in engaging with outsider's research methodologies. British teachers in Hancock (1997)'s paper also reported a "less than professional condition" with too large a class size and teachers being left with no time and energy, commitment to even "contemplating" research activities. However, this paper was not a study but rather an article offering Hancock's observations and opinions.

Borg (2009) asked 150 Iranian EFL teachers and found moderate to low levels of teachers' reading and doing research. The participant teachers attributed this limited research engagement to a lack of time, knowledge, and access to material. In this quantitative study, the difficulties were listed out in the questionnaire and the participants only had to tick the ones that match with their situation rather than offering their own difficulties.

Potter's (2001) study with five teacher-researchers shows that they face the barriers of time constraints, relationships among colleagues, accountability, pressure from the system and a lack of confidence as well as experience in the research field. Nevertheless, due to the limited number of participants in the study, the results remain rather restricted.

Griffiths, Thompson and Hryniewicz (2010) pointed out that a specific group of teachers – the teacher-educators at two universities in the UK faced several barriers to research, including a tough transition to research culture of universities; a lack of time due to intensive teaching load, family responsibilities, unsustained time for completing substantial

research; low self-confidence and unclear research identity. A study by Ellis and Loughland (2016) which compared experiences of teachers in Singapore and New South Wales University (Australia) concluded that teachers suffered from scarcity of time, pressure of completing the syllabus and inadequate training as researchers along with limitations in school leadership and supportive academic partner. Both these studies are also small scale comparing the situation in two universities, so the results tend to be very specific to these particular groups.

Allison and Carey (2007) conducted surveys and interviews with 22 teachers at a university language centre in Canada who reported to be constrained in their research ability due to lack of time; encouragement and incentive. Ulla (2018) reported on the experience of Philippines high school teachers in implementing classroom research projects and found four similar main areas of difficulties faced by these teachers namely lack of financial support, heavy teaching load, inadequate research skills and knowledge, lack of materials and resources. However, as this research was conducted in a specific area in Canada or the Philippines, their results are also distinct to the situation in these regions.

Overall, these studies look into difficulties facing different groups of teachers such as high school teachers, experienced university teachers, teacher-educators in very specific areas or groups; whereas, little research has been done into the difficulties that novice university teachers encounter in establishing themselves in the academia sphere, especially in the context of Vietnam. Grey and Campbell-Evans (2002)'s study suggests four major obstacles in promoting the role of teacher-researcher among beginning teachers:

- i. incorporating teacher and researcher roles,
- ii. creating chances for teachers to recognise and develop practical research abilities,
- iii. removing the barriers of discourse in published research papers,
- iv. ix. boost teachers' confidence and skills to critically review education policies.

In Vietnam's context, according to Lê Thị Lý (2015), young researchers face numerous barriers in their working conditions, including the widely differing researching conditions and environments between Vietnam and other countries, lack of cooperation, complicated administrative process, inappropriate reward/appraisal policies, and lack of experts in research review.

Hiep (2006) investigated the research culture in English Language Teacher Education in Vietnam and found that English teachers in Vietnam often have low research aspirations due to dissatisfaction with evaluation regulations, conventions and formats of reporting research outcomes; lack of time; lack of materials and opportunities to disseminate results; and lack of training.

Apart from this study, there remain few studies into the difficulties faced by novice teacher-researchers at universities in Vietnam. Perceiving this gap, I decided to conduct a qualitative research into the challenges that beginning university teachers at one university faculty in Hanoi have to face in conducting research in relation to working conditions.

### ***2.5. Support That Teachers Need in Research Practice***

One major concern of this study is the support that novice teachers need to better conduct their research. House (1983) proposes a model of four types of support or what he calls social support for teachers including (1) emotional support such as liking, love, empathy; (2) instrumental support (services or goods), (3) informational support (information) and (4) appraisal support (p. 39). Within the scope of this study, the term "support" refers to all forms of support, emotional, instrumental, informational or appraisal, that novice teachers may receive from school administrators and other stakeholders as an incentive to help them improve their research practice.

Griffiths et al. (2010) asked a group of teacher educators and their mentors at two universities how to develop teacher research practice. Their recommendations include

- i. Better communication about research opportunities, information about journals

- ii. Introduction of statutory study leave
- iii. Changes in promotions criteria
- iv. Dedicated research time
- v. Balance between teaching and research
- vi. Promotion of teachers' research ambitions
- vii. Formal training and induction in research for beginning researchers
- viii. Structured and regular supervision, guidance and feedback from research mentors for beginning researchers
- ix. Structured peer support of research mentors and co-ordinators for more experienced researchers
- x. Collaborative working on research or research buddying for both groups
- xi. Collaboration between researchers and teacher-researcher.

Mohr (2004) proposed six forms of support that are crucial for better teacher research namely

- i. An experienced teacher-researcher leader who would help new researchers in research process, facilitate group meetings, oversee administrative tasks
- ii. Opportunities for collaboration within and across school groups
- iii. Time for teacher researchers to convene by reduced teaching duties
- iv. Support for writing and publishing (revising, editing research reports, clerical support and funding sources for printing and publishing reports)
- v. Recognition of teacher research (through chances for teachers to present their findings)
- vi. Support of the principal (recognising the time, effort and devotion of teachers to research practice). (p. 4)

Mohr (2004) even put forward a project proposal to boost research activities at school which include three components:

- i. School-based Teacher Researcher Group with an experienced teacher researcher as leader
- ii. The planning group who would oversee the project and make decisions
- iii. The Teacher-Researcher Network to help teachers publicise their work, promote system-wide support and help guide policies. (p. 5)

Few studies have been conducted into

the support needed for better research practice in Vietnam. Hiep (2006) believed the following changes need to be made to promote the research culture in Vietnam.

- i. Scholars must be encouraged to conduct quality research rather than superficial projects
- ii. Research projects need to be reviewed objectively (i.e. by international academics)
- iii. Researchers need to be consulted in designing appropriate formats for research reporting and presentation
- iv. Universities need to offer more practical research courses and seminars
- v. There should be more collaboration between western-trained researchers and locally trained teachers
- vi. Schools and governments should encourage and support teachers to attend seminars and conferences at institutional and international level through financial support
- vii. Local journals need to be promoted. (pp. 15-16)

Therefore, this study is conducted to contribute to a better understanding of the specific support that novice teacher-researchers at one university faculty in Hanoi need to improve the quality of their research.

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

#### 3.1. Scope of Study

This multiple-case study employs interview as a way to look into the working conditions of novice teachers at one university faculty in Hanoi in relation to their research

practice. Working conditions cover physical (facilities, resources,...) and non-physical conditions (workload, time, support from colleagues,...) These factors have been coded into specific questions in the interview that are presented in the next section. Accordingly, the study also concerns itself with support from school administrators and other stakeholders that teachers need to improve their research practice.

#### 3.2. Research Methods

##### 3.2.1. Research Sampling Method

The study employs criterion-sampling method in which a number of pre-set criteria were used in selecting participants. To be more specific, participants in the study must meet the following requirements:

- i. Being a university teacher;
- ii. Having had at most five years' teaching experience;
- iii. Having conducted at least one study;
- iv. Agreeing to take part in this study on a voluntary term.

##### 3.2.2. Description of Samples

After I sent invitations to novice teachers in the university through Facebook groups and individual chat, six teachers agreed to be interviewed and participate in the study. The six novice teachers with under five years of teaching experience who are currently teaching at one Faculty. Most of them had bachelor degrees and were pursuing master program or were master graduates during the data collection phase of this study. Profiles of these participants at the time of research can be found below.

Pseudonym	Gender	Teaching experience	Researching experience
Phuong	Female	1.5 years	2 studies
An	Female	1.5 years	2 studies
Binh	Female	3 years	2 studies
Ha	Female	3 years	3 studies
Thanh	Female	4 years	3 studies
Hoang	Male	3 years	5 studies

There were five female and one male teachers who took part in this study. At the time of this study, most of them have had between 1.5

to 4 years of work experience. The participants have conducted at least two studies and at most five studies during their career, some of which

are their graduation papers from bachelor degree or master degree courses, whereas others are conducted when they work as a lecturer.

### 3.2.3. Data Collection Instrument

The study employed face-to-face semi-structured interview with each teacher individually with each interview lasting for between 15 and 30 minutes. All the interviews were recorded with consent of the participants. A set of questions and prompts were prepared in advance but interviewees were asked to give further details and explanations for their answers. The interviews were all conducted in Vietnamese.

The interview questions contain two major sections. The first section covers questions about difficulties that the novice teachers face in doing research concerning different aspects of their working conditions. The last part focuses on their suggestions for further support needed for better researching practice.

The interview question log is as follows

Question 1. Do you find your current working condition supportive to your research practice? Why/Why not?

Question 2. What difficulties in terms of working conditions do you face when doing your research?

Prompts for question 2

- Do you have enough time to do research aside your class instructional time?
- Do the authorities in your faculty/school encourage you to do research?
- Are you provided with enough physical facilities/resources needed to do research?
- Are you provided with enough grants/financial support to do research?
- Are you provided with information about research projects/opportunities?
- Do the authorities in your faculty/school provide specific mentoring and instructional programs for you in doing research?
- Are you provided with regular instruction/feedback on your research work?
- Do your school / faculty encourage collaboration among teachers in doing research?

- Is the research atmosphere in your school encouraging?
- Do the authorities in your faculty/school acknowledge your achievements in doing research?
- Do you receive support from colleagues, students or outsiders in doing research?

Question 3. What kind of support do you need in order to conduct your research more effectively?

### 3.2.4. Data Analysis

Firstly, I transcribed all recordings into written texts through Microsoft Word onto the computer and filed into a common database. After that, I translated the data from Vietnamese into English. The translated draft was later sent to the teachers themselves so that they could check the accuracy. Next, content data analysis was used during the data analysis phase. For research question 1, I used thematic analysis in which I analysed the data gathered according to pre-set themes of working conditions namely (1) time, facilities, resources, financial aids; (2) authority's encouragement and acknowledgement, (3) information, mentoring and feedback, (4) collaboration, research atmosphere and support from outsiders. As regards research question 2, I generated emerging themes from teachers' comments. Finally, a report was written to summarise findings on both research questions. I have also sent the report to an experienced teacher-researcher and received feedback and recommendations for correction.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Research Question 1: Novice English Teachers' Difficulties Related to Working Conditions in Doing Research

One of the most effective ways to better understand novice teachers' difficulties in doing research is to get an overview of their specific working conditions. First, the teachers were asked to give a general comment on how well their working conditions support the practice of researching. This time, most of the teachers generally agreed that their conditions of work did support their research, some even said it was very supportive. However, going into details,

their answers seemed to vary to quite a certain extent. Specifically, I went further to investigate the specific aspects of working conditions that may affect novice teachers' research practice including the available time, facilities & resources, financial aids and grants; authority's encouragement and acknowledgement; mentoring, feedback and information; collaboration among teachers, research atmosphere and support from outsiders.

#### **4.1.1. Available Time, Facilities, Resources and Financial Aids for Research**

As regards time factor, all six participants claimed that should they teach within the university only they would have enough time to conduct research. According to them, each teacher is assigned to teach between 12 to 16 periods/week which means they only spend on average 10 to 48 hours at school. In reality, however, most of them are required to teach extra classes at centers or at home to make ends meet, thus they did not think they had enough time to devote themselves to doing research.

If I just teach in school, I'd have time. But then I'd not have enough money to survive to do research. Of course, I need to balance my time for teaching outside school and at school too, to have enough time to do research. I'd prefer I have more time to read the materials. We need to read like 100 materials before we can produce one material - An

Those who do not teach outside the school (Thanh and Binh) also noted that they themselves had enough time but for teachers who had extra classes, it would not be enough.

In terms of available facilities and resources for doing research, the teachers in the study showed a relatively positive attitude as they have enough access to needed materials for research through the school library or online websites. Phuong showed her great gratitude to the school for being allowed to use some expensive translating devices in the laboratory during her research. However, all the teachers specifically noted that they did all of this on their own without support from anyone. The only person who was not quite satisfied with the resources provided is Ha who said:

I want more. Like I want to have access to different kinds of online libraries. But here I have to make use of free sources of information. I don't have an account like a library for books or documents, sometimes they require an account or a certain amount of money.

Finally, the teachers also offered their opinion on the financial aids from the school in doing research. Five out of six participants claimed that the current amount of grants given by the school was not enough and they needed further financial support.

As far as I know, I only have 700.000 thousand (VND) for a presentation at an international conference, I think it'd be a really small amount of money regarding the fee and travel expense that I have to waste on each presentation – Binh.

All the research I have conducted is on my own money not from the faculty, the school. Although I hope the school have some funds to support the teacher doing research, or as a novice teacher maybe because of my lack of experience in researching, until now I haven't received any financial support from the school. - Phuong

Only Hoang shared he was glad that at least there is some support and he had "no other choice."

#### **4.1.2. Authority's Encouragement and Acknowledgement**

Next, the teachers commented on the encouragement and acknowledgement they received from the faculty or school's authority. The majority of the teachers agreed that the faculty did encourage them through the requirements of 600 research hours per year, as said by Binh.

[...]. They (the authority) consider it as... an obvious duty, we should consider research as an inherent part of doing our job. By that, I know if we don't do enough research, we'd be criticised by the authorities. They encourage us to do research that way.

In Binh's words, rather than being encouraged intrinsically, she seemed to

understand the requirement of research as something she would be “criticised” if she did not do enough. Some other participants found the encouragement from the faculty seemed a little bit “strict” or involved “forcing.”

No, I don't find any motivation or inspiration (from the authorities), just something others are forcing you to do.  
– Thanh

When it comes to whether the school/faculty acknowledge their research achievements and efforts, the teachers had similar answers that the only acknowledgement they received was in form of the research scores by the end of the school year.

[...]. There's no reward, one teacher can have some rewards from the university/faculty only when that teacher has about 800 or 1000 research grades for a year. If we only meet the basic requirements of the university, we only survive, that's it and we get nothing  
– Binh

Some also believed their lack of experience and the low credibility of their research outcomes were possible reasons why they may not receive other kinds of rewards for now.

I think the school only acknowledge us on the scores. Even as the one who conducts it, I still doubt the significance of my own research. Why, how can the faculty pay attention to my research? In terms of quantity they care, but not in terms of quality. I don't think that they care. As long as I have something to show. - An

#### **4.1.3. Information, Mentoring and Feedback**

Regarding the available information about research opportunities, the teachers all concurred that they had received enough, even sometimes too much information via email by the faculty. However, it is noted that the information focuses most on the upcoming conferences in the country or abroad so that teachers could submit their papers and make presentations or posters.

To answer the question about the mentoring they have received for doing research,

the participants again had a common response that they appreciated the workshop series for novice researchers organized by the faculties in the last two years. However, it was admitted they had not taken most advantage or had gained little from those research workshops.

They did have some kind of training session, some workshops to help the teachers familiarise with doing research. But just some of them are effective, I've attended 3 workshops and I think only one (last year) was really helpful, gave me some benefits. I don't like the recent one – Thanh

Again, Hoang seemed to be the only person who had a different thought and stressed the importance of self-reliance.

Uhm, I think I've received quite enough (mentoring). Actually we need to gain knowledge by ourselves, rather than waiting on others. Like the workshop by Ms. L, there is a series of that which give instruction on each step. That is quite good and supportive already. - Hoang

With respect to regular feedback for novice teachers during the research process, all the participants claimed that they had none to very little feedback on their work.

I can ask, but not really. Often when I have problem and questions, I figure it out by myself instead of asking others. I don't know who to ask, except for my co-workers. – Thanh

Probably no, when we have done a research and found out some results, we submit and whether we get admitted or not depends on us. Nobody is there to help us. – Hoang

I think it depends on our proactiveness. I'm not proactive, I didn't ask a lot of researchers about my research. I didn't have a lot of feedback on my research, somehow I'm afraid that I may inconvenience them. – Binh

#### **4.1.4. Collaboration Among Teachers, Research Atmosphere and Support From Outsiders**

The next question revolves around the possibilities of collaboration in research efforts

among teachers. The participants claimed that there had been little explicit effort from the authorities to foster teachers' cooperation in doing research. However, all of them appeared to see the benefits of collaboration and stressed the pro-activeness of teachers themselves in teaming up with each other while doing research.

The faculty didn't do a lot in that (encouraging collaboration), I think. But because of the pressure of 600 hours of research, some teachers will pair up together and conduct the research together, maybe to reduce the time and pressure together. They did it on their own. – Phuong

Judging the general research atmosphere in the faculty and the school, the teachers came up with both positive and negative responses. On the one hand, Hoang, An and Binh believed that the atmosphere is “dynamic,” “rushed,” “stimulating,” and “encouraging” as

Yeah, it was really encouraging as I can see a lot of people really passionate about doing research. They invest a lot of time and money to conduct research. They are really good models of researcher, I find it stimulating, encouraging. – Binh

It's a very dynamic research atmosphere. Everyone's talking about going to conferences now. The main discourse when teachers meet each other is about 'Have you completed the 600 hours? Are you doing any research now?' – An

However, Thanh and Ha chose to differ on this particular topic, showing an opposite attitude towards the atmosphere of research in the school, considering the research environment “boring,” “not really healthy,” “really forcing.”

I'm not sure (about the research atmosphere). I would say it's kind of boring. You know what, I even saw some people I know, they actually cheated. One researcher asked to share a research with someone just to have enough hours, or many people only do it in a sloppy way to deal with the requirements. – Thanh

In my school, there're a lot of teachers doing research but it's like because we are forced to do it, it's not a really healthy environment, like really forcing. – Ha

Finally, the teachers were asked whether they had received any support from outsiders in their efforts to conduct research. Most of the teachers expressed gratefulness to their students who were always available and willing to participate in their research. Also, many talked about how they had been greatly assisted by their colleagues in and outside the school who were highly supportive all the time.

I receive support from my students. [...]. One good thing I can think about is my colleagues. They are always friendly and actually they try to be useful if I ask them something in doing research. – Phuong

To sum up, despite agreeing that the working condition does support their research doing, the teachers have a more diverse response towards specific aspects of working conditions. In details, they had generally positive attitude about the provision of facilities, resources, and information about research opportunities. However, an opposite reaction is recorded when it comes to the available time, financial aids and grants, mentoring and feedback, encouragement and acknowledgement from authorities. The other aspects of the overall research atmosphere and collaboration among teachers generated neutral response.

#### ***4.2. Research Question 2: Support That Novice Teachers Need to Conduct Research More Effectively***

Another important question in the research is what kind of support each novice teacher thought they need in order to better conduct their research. The teachers shared one common suggestion that they wish to have more financial support from the school as it is quite expensive sometimes to present their paper in international conferences.

I think there could be a lot of types of support, the most important one'd be financial support. [...]. I have to attend 1 academic conference and deliver, it'd cost a lot of money, I have to pay for the attendance fee and also the travelling

fee, some international conferences have high costs. For example, Thai TESOL'd cost 4 million. - Binh

Furthermore, one important way that the teachers think they could be better supported is through the mentoring and consultation from more experienced teacher-researchers in the school.

Because I'm a young teacher and I didn't have any history in conducting research, I actually need a lot of support. Firstly, it's about the knowledge, maybe some guiding because I really need someone who has more experience in research they can guide me, at least talk to me to share their point of view, their motivation, or sometimes guiding for the questions, the steps how to do it, how to deal with it. - Phuong

I need one-on-one support or we can be co-authors. I want to do the research with senior teachers, so that I can learn from them. I want to work with teachers who have deep insights on the topic that we wanna do, they can locate some of the topic areas, so we don't need to spend much time finding the topic and be so misleading on what we are finding. - An

My research field is all action research. Now I want to try to do linguistics but I don't know where to start. [...]. If there's someone doing research in that field, I want to learn from their experience like how to do it. - Hoang

On the topic of how workshops should be held, Binh and An proposed some changes to the way workshops such as having small-scale workshops or workshops that allow one-on-one support.

Maybe we could have some kinds of small group of workshops. Like, we've got a lot of workshops, a lot of attendees at the workshop, there's not many chances for each and every participant to raise their voice and talk about their problem. So we have small groups of workshop. - Binh

We have a lot of workshops on research. What I really need is one-on-one support, not general mentoring. I don't feel that's meaningful to me. I'm feeling

like I'm swimming in the sea on my own. - An

However, Binh also carefully noted that she would feel pressurized if supervised by someone. Rather, she would prefer to have a research consultant.

The problem would be resolved if I have a mentor/supervisor when conducting a research, but I feel a little bit worried about mentoring at the same time. Because I've gone through 3 years of mentoring, and I find it kind of stressful. It'd be nice if we have a consultant, a research consultant. They'd, how to say, we could approach them when we have some problems, when we need some advice, but they would not be really a supervisor, then I'd be really stressed. - Binh

In addition, many teachers also think that the requirements of 600 hours of research for teachers is too much and should be reduced or restructured.

From the faculty, the school I think that it's to reduce the pressure. Until now, not only me, other teachers, they always conduct the research because of the pressure of 600 hours a year. I think 400 hours is enough. - Phuong

I think it's better for the novice teachers if the faculty authority can reduce the amount of required hours for novice teachers. When they're new to the environment, they've to take time to get accustomed to the program, the course, material, and have to struggle with mentoring program, it'd be stressful for them to fulfill 3 duties at the same time: teaching, doing research, and material adaptation. - Binh

Binh also put forward the idea to change the requirement of 600 hours into two school years.

When I attended a faculty meeting, I heard someone suggest conducting the research like once every two years. This year, the teacher focuses on teaching duty only, next year, they focus on research, the school should have a policy to reduce the requirement. - Binh

Finally, An hoped to be provided with

more information about international conferences and how to publish papers in reliable journals and articles. Meanwhile, Ha herself needed easier access to materials and resources for her research.

I need some kind of accounts to online library when I need the material I don't know where to find, and I have to ask some of my friends who are studying abroad to give it to me. It's really inconvenient. – Ha

By and large, the kinds of support that novice teachers suggested seem to be mainly instrumental support in the form of more financial aids from the school and more individual mentoring and consultation on different stages of doing research as well as reducing the research requirements each year for teachers.

## 5. Discussion of Results and Implications

### 5.1. Discussion of Results

#### 5.1.1. Research Question 1

In general, despite agreeing that the working condition did support their research doing, the teachers had diverse response towards specific aspects of working conditions. In details, they had generally positive attitude about the provision of facilities, resources, and information about research opportunities. The other aspects of encouragement and acknowledgement from authorities, collaboration among teachers, and the overall research atmosphere of the school generated a neutral response.

However, a more negative reaction was recorded when it came to the available time, financial aids and grants, mentoring and feedback. The finding that teachers suffered from scarcity of time aligns with previous studies (Potter, 2001; Hiep, 2006; Ellis & Loughland, 2016; Ulla, 2018). Teachers in general, especially novice teachers often find problems managing their time among various tasks such as teaching, managing the students, dealing with administrative requirements (Veenman, 1984; Gordon, 1991; Carpenter, 2002; Farrel, 2003; Souder, 2005; Griffiths, 2010). These workload and lack of time may

reduce teachers' effectiveness in their work as well as affect their emotional well-being (Carpenter, 2002; Flores & Day, 2006; Intrator, 2006; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008).

Importantly, the novice teachers in the current study mentioned the lack of mentoring and feedback on their work. This has also been found by several previous studies in which beginning teachers need but often do not receive adequate support from administration and co-workers (Carpenter, 2002; Farrel, 2006; Leslie, 2010; Blannan & Bleisten, 2012). Particularly, one teacher in this study cited their own hesitation in approaching senior teachers in fear of "inconveniencing" them. This is indeed a common mindset that novice teachers share in the induction period of their career in which they are afraid of causing inconveniences to more experienced teachers. This indicates a gap that the novice teacher sees between themselves and more experienced colleagues and a need for a stronger collaborative community of inquiry within the faculty and school.

One new finding from this current study compared to previous literature into constraints facing young teacher-researchers is that the six participants particularly reiterated the lack of financial aids for research doing. The shortage of financial aids for research doing has not been mentioned in any available studies into teachers' difficulties in conducting research which reported other difficulties related to time, energy, research identity, confidence, etc. (Hancock, 1997; Potter, 2001; Allison & Carey, 2007; Griffiths, Thompson & Hryniewicz, 2010; Ellis & Loughland, 2016; Ulla, 2018, Hiep, 2006). This gap is not surprising as most novice teachers in the current study referred to financial aids needed for paying registration fees and travel cost to conferences; whereas, normally teachers could submit their study for publication in journals without having to pay any money. However, the novice teachers' concerns about financial support also cover the necessary fee for the procedures of literature reviewing, data collecting and analysis such as buying books, printing materials, which are legitimate.

#### 5.1.2. Research Question 2

With respect to support they need, the beginning teachers in this study asked for more

financial aids, personal mentoring and consultation from experienced researchers as well as lower requirement of research hours, all of which fall into the category of instrumental support. These suggestions are partly in keeping with Mohr's (2004) list of six support types that teacher researchers need, namely an experienced teacher-researcher leader, opportunities for collaboration, time, support for writing and publishing, recognition of the teacher-researcher.

In terms of financial support, it is acknowledged that the study was conducted in between the school year, so the teachers in the studies might not have received any support for their study. According to the issued policies of the university, teachers could receive between 5 million to 16 million VND (approximately 200 dollars to over 600 dollars) for an article being published on internationally prestigious journals or conferences, depending on the credibility of the published platform. Teachers with the highest number of research hours in the school will also be rewarded with the Principal's Certificate of Merits, between 3 to 10 million VND (from about 130 to 400 dollars) along with reduction of teaching hours between 5 and 20% for the following school year. However, apparently, this study shows that the novice teachers seemed dissatisfied or unclear of the financial aid policies.

Concerning the mentoring program, most of the teachers in the study would appreciate more chances to receive personal support from predecessors who have experience in the same field of research interests. One form of support is mentoring or the "nurturing process in which a skilled or more experienced person teaches, sponsors, encourages, and counsels a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/or personal development" (Anderson & Shannon, 1988, p. 40). Studies have also confirmed the positive relationship between mentoring programs and novice teachers' confidence and success during and after induction process (Huling-Austin, 1992; Weinstein, 1988; Mann & Tang, 2002; Odell & Huling, 2004; Hobson et al., 2012; Branna & Bleistein, 2012; Farrel, 2012). Beginning teachers are found to benefit from mentors who are approachable, willing to listen, willing to

share material and advice, encouraging collaborative learning and reflective practice (Carter & Francis, 2001; Marable & Raimondi, 2007; Lofstom & Eisenschmidt, 2009). Mentors should (1) assist in setting up a general framework for the conduct of the research, (2) help teachers find a focus and (3) commenting on teacher's attempts of data collection and analysis (Borg, 2006, p. 24).

Currently in the faculty, novice teachers have been given mentoring programs but mainly in their teaching practice in class. In fact, acknowledging the difficulties novice teachers may face, their faculty authority has organized some workshops related to action research with speakers being experienced teacher-researchers in the faculty itself. This is due to the result of an informal survey conducted by the Faculty themselves at the beginning of this school year among all teachers at the faculty to which 28 teachers responded. Among them, almost 70% of respondents showed they want to have monthly workshops to help them with accomplishing 600 hours of research. However, in the year, there have been only two workshops related to research provided, and despite certain appreciation of the workshop, it is a great pity that few of the teachers in this study have been able to take full advantage of such a workshop or find it helpful for their personal research effort. The Faculty has also formed a support group in order to support teachers in research activities, yet the group's presence has been rather vague so far.

More importantly, from the perspective of participant teachers in this study, they need support more in the form of personal mentoring through collaboration in specific research. This is also closely aligned with proposals by Mohr (2004) that collaboration within the school and across the school is a fundamental factor in boosting educational research quality. Findings from the informal survey of the Faculty in 2019 also confirm this need of the teachers. In this survey, many teachers at the faculty asked for more assistance from the faculty to organize group collaboration among beginning teachers themselves as well as with experienced teacher-researchers in the Faculty. A lot of opinions even requested to become research assistants for experienced researchers or receive personal supervision from the experienced researcher in

their own research projects. Even though the school has publicly encouraged such partnership among teachers especially between experienced and inexperienced teachers in research efforts, according to the participants of the current study, they had few chances to be involved in such projects. It is thus important that the faculty and the school have schemes to have structured collaborative research projects that involve both experienced and beginning teacher-researchers.

Many studies (Potter, 2001; Grima-Farrel, 2017; Man & Tang, 2012) found that collaborative research is a crucial method to support teacher's research practice to inform their own teaching. Devos, Durpiez and Paquay (2012) even found that frequent collaboration with experienced teachers and quality-mentoring support promotes higher self-efficacy and low depression in novice-teachers. However, types and method of support that experienced teachers provide for their beginning colleagues also need to be considered with care. It has been found that inappropriate support involving insensitiveness, unsolicited advice, judgment and opinions may actually further burden the teachers in need of support (Sarros & Sarros, 1992). Griffiths et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of structured support and collaboration between beginning and more experienced teacher-researchers. Mohr (2004) also strongly favors the idea of school-based research groups which is led by an experienced teacher-researcher who could assist newer teacher-researchers through the process, oversee and coordinate the groups' research projects.

According to House (1983), apart from instrumental aids, there are three more kinds of support that can be provided namely emotional concern, information and appraisal. Particularly, this study found that the teachers believed they had received adequate information about research opportunities, so it is understandable why this type of support was not mentioned by the participants. Though the novice teachers did not explicitly call for more appraisal of their work, they shared their feelings that they had little to no acknowledgement of their research due to their shortage of experience and quality of research outcomes. Acknowledgement from school authorities of researching efforts is also considered an important type of support for teacher-researchers that should not be overlooked (Mohr, 2004).

The fact that the beginning teachers attributed the lack of appraisal to their own shortcomings also reflects their low level of self-confidence, as also found in my previous study (Lan, 2020). Griffiths et al. (2010) recommended that attention be paid to building a research identity for teacher-researchers to boost their confidence and autonomy. The need for building teachers' research identity is also particularly prominent as one participant in this study shared that many of her colleagues only did a sloppy job in researching so as to satisfy the requirements while not caring about the research outcomes at all, which she deemed a great pity. This is also in keeping with findings in previous studies. Doan and Nguyen (2005) found that teachers in Vietnam did research only because they had no other choices. Hiep (2006) also believed that many teachers did research only to "satisfy institutional requirements" (p. 3) and called for Vietnamese universities to motivate scholars to conduct "real and quality research rather than superficial projects" (p. 15).

My previous study also shows that the novice teachers oriented toward extrinsic motivations (Lan, 2020). Available studies have come up with mixed results as regards the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in doing research. Some have shown that intrinsic motivations in doing research correlates highly with research productivity (Blackburn et al., 1978; Fulton, 1978), others claim that intrinsic motivations has little impact and extrinsic ones such as promotion prospect are needed (Blackburn et al., 1991; Glass et al., 1996; Tien et al., 1996). Thus, it is crucial that besides financial support, rewards and other encouragements, the faculty and the school should help teachers establish a research identity. This research identity will help teachers realise the intrinsic rewards and significance of doing research so that they feel inspired to do research properly rather than just trying to meet the demands of 600 hours. Again, support from peers, supervisors and mentors are imperative in this construction of research identity for beginning teachers.

Some teachers in this current study proposed that the school reconsider the requirement of the 600 hours of research for novice teachers. In reality, beginning teachers at

the university in this study are exempted from doing research for the first year of the induction process to allow them more time to familiarise themselves with the workload and working environment. Therefore, they only start to have 600 hours of research requirement from the second year onwards. Yet, this study findings show that some novice teachers believe having to complete 600 hours of research is still a source of pressure.

### 5.2. Implications

In the light of the discussion presented above and literature, I would propose the following courses of action to be taken by the school and faculty to provide better support to novice teacher-researchers

- (1) Surveys should be conducted to identify novice teachers' perceptions of appropriate financial aids in doing research or better inform novice teachers on this policy;
- (2) Personal mentoring programs for novice teachers in terms of research practice should be introduced in which the experienced research mentors provide assistance to the novice teacher-researcher by
  - a. Helping them set up a framework for the research,
  - b. Helping them identify a focus,
  - c. Commenting on data collection and analysis processes. (Borg, 2006, p. 24)
- (3) The school should have a structured and clear rewards policies for experienced teacher-researchers when mentoring less experienced ones
  - a. providing adequate training to everyone involved,
  - b. increasing ownership and accountability of experienced researcher,
  - c. giving credits for experienced teachers for their efforts,
  - d. encouraging emergent research from teachers' fields of interest rather than university's agenda,
  - e. providing adequate time and support for initial phase of question formulation,
  - f. promoting data-collection strategies that include students'

perspectives. (Levin & Rock, p. 148)

- (4) The school should re-evaluate their rewards and appraisal policies to make sure novice teachers feel included;
- (5) The school should help build a research identity for teacher-researchers through encouraging stronger peer support and collaborative environment in research.

### 6. Conclusion, Limitations and Further Research

To summarise, as regards their working conditions, the teachers in this study have a rather positive attitude toward availability of facilities, resources, and information of research opportunities. However, aspects such as time, financial support and mentoring seem to be considered lacking by the teachers. Therefore, it is suggested that more support is provided in the form of financial aids, re-adjustment of research requirements to promote intrinsic motivations in research activities, and especially personal mentoring or collaborative research projects between novice and more experienced teacher-researchers in the institution.

I hope that this study has shed some light on the difficulties novice teachers have and the support they need in doing research, so that proper courses of action by the school authorities to adjust the working conditions could be taken promptly. As data was collected from teachers' self-report through interviews, the research outcomes are inevitably prone to subjectivity. Also, personally, as a novice teacher-researcher myself, I started the study as a way to see whether other novice teacher-researchers faced similar problems to myself. Therefore, I have to admit I may have had a certain bias regarding the research questions at the beginning. Yet, during the process of data collection and data analysis, I made extra efforts to assume the role of an objective researcher and let the data speak for itself. I did so by asking the participants themselves to comment on my question log in the interview and made adjustments accordingly. I also sent them the translated version of the data to triangulate the data. After writing the report, I also sent it to one experienced teacher-researcher for feedback and made changes according to her feedback. However, my own lack of experience in doing qualitative research still may have

reduced the credibility and reliability of the study in certain ways beyond my control.

The small number of participants in this study also indicates that these results may not reflect the opinion of the larger population of novice teachers at other universities in Vietnam. However, I hope that some universities in Vietnam, if encountering similar problems with a low rate of research among their novice staff members, may also gain certain insights from this study. Afterwards, they could conduct further research in their own institutions to strengthen their research culture, which may not only benefit themselves but also serve to partly elevate the research practice among young practitioners in our country as a whole.

Moreover, this study was conducted in the middle of the school year, whereas financial aids from the school are often provided at the end of the school year. As a result, the teacher's concern related to such a problem could be partly due to the timing of research. Further study should be done to explore in-depth the effectiveness of mentoring or collaborative schemes in research projects between novice and experienced teacher-researchers. A suggestion of building a learning community or network for novice teacher-researchers rather than one-on-one mentoring is also a topic worthy of further investigation.

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## KHÓ KHĂN VỀ MÔI TRƯỜNG LÀM VIỆC MÀ GIÁNG VIÊN TRẺ GẶP TRONG CÔNG TÁC NGHIÊN CỨU KHOA HỌC VÀ HỖ TRỢ HỌ CẦN

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu tìm hiểu về những khó khăn liên quan đến môi trường làm việc mà các giảng viên trẻ dạy tiếng Anh ở một khoa thuộc một trường đại học ở Hà Nội gặp phải trong công tác nghiên cứu khoa học và những hỗ trợ họ cần. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp phỏng vấn trực tiếp với sáu giảng viên trẻ trong tại khoa để thu dữ liệu định tính. Kết quả cho thấy các giảng viên đánh giá tích cực đối với cơ sở vật chất/dữ liệu phục vụ nghiên cứu, thông tin về cơ hội nghiên cứu nhưng đánh giá tiêu cực về áp lực nghiên cứu cao, việc thiếu thời gian và thiếu sự hướng dẫn từ những giáo viên có kinh nghiệm hơn. Các giảng viên trẻ mong muốn được hỗ trợ thêm về tài chính và được hướng dẫn một – một trong nghiên cứu cũng như được điều chỉnh yêu cầu về số giờ nghiên cứu.

*Từ khoá:* phát triển giáo viên, nghiên cứu khoa học, môi trường làm việc của giáo viên