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Training Teachers in Vietnam: A Self-Assessment of Competencies By Student Teachers in the Northwest Region

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore how student teachers self-evaluated their competencies and evaluated the effectiveness of teacher training in the Northwest Universities and Colleges. A total of 538 student teachers from universities and colleges of teacher education in Northwest Vietnam voluntarily participated in the survey. The questionnaire focused on the self-assessment of these student teachers' qualities and competencies as a teacher. They were also asked to evaluate the training they received for these competencies. The results showed that most of the student teachers could identify their strengths and limitations in the role of a teacher and assessed themselves at good levels for the surveyed competencies including teacher ideology and qualities, professional skills, and soft skills. In general, the training just met their expectations, yet no particular field was evaluated at an excellent level. Based on these findings, suggestions were made to review the initial teacher education programs at the participating universities and colleges.

Keywords: student teachers, student teachers' competencies, teacher education, teacher ideology, evaluation of teacher education programs, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

No one can deny that teachers played a vital role in the educational system. Hattie (2012) found that the contributions of the teacher were among the most significant factors that affect students' success, even in the most modern classes with the aid of sufficient technology. Hattie (2017) also found that collective teacher efficiency and teacher estimates of achievement significantly affected students' achievement (Hattie, 2017). Until now, the role of teachers in assuring teaching quality is still unchangeable (Muzaffar et al., 2023: 367).

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Stronge (2018) noticed that the way to measure teacher effectiveness was still controversial, yet there was a consensus agreement that "effective teachers make an extraordinary and lasting impact on their students' lives" (p. 4).

Liakopoulou (2011) researched teachers' professional competence to find out what factors contribute to a teacher's effectiveness. A result of 727 secondary school teachers showed that "personality traits as being a dominant contributing factor to their effectiveness," more important than other factors including pedagogical knowledge and skills (Liakopoulou, 2011: 72). Teachers' professional competence as mentioned in this study, similar to the work of Liakopoulou (2011), includes not only their academic credentials, subject-matter knowledge, abilities, and skills but also their characteristics and ideology related to teaching.

Hattie (2008, p. 108) also endorsed that "not all teachers are experts, and not all teachers have powerful effects on students," which means the quality of the teachers is extremely important in fostering their roles. Therefore, teachers' training at the tertiary level should be carefully considered.

Barni et al. (2019) noted that, "Teachers' personal values drive their goals and behaviours at school" (p. 1). Therefore, the qualities of teachers should be the utmost matter to consider in educational quality assurance. Ates and Kadioglu (2018, p. 104) stated that to train qualified teachers, it is necessary to select candidates who love the teaching profession, have sensitivity toward their students, and that teachers must continuously improve themselves.

Zu et al. (2022) presented nine qualities of a teacher, including Professional Ideal, Professional Responsibility, Professional Attitude, Professional Discipline, Professional Skills, Professional Conscience, Professional Style, Professional Honor, and Ideological Leading. Stronge (2018) discussed six qualities of effective teachers, including Professional Knowledge, Instructional Planning, Instructional Delivery, Assessment, Learning Environment, and Professionalism. He analysed the details of those components to show their vital roles for an effective teacher in the 21st century.

Depending on each subject, teachers' professional competencies are diverse. For example, a Maths teacher and a Literature teacher will need to have different sets of competencies. Yet, there are always common competencies that every teacher needs to possess, such as the competencies to plan the lessons, deliver instructions, assess students, and so on. Hakim (2015) analysed four groups of teacher competencies that contribute much to teaching: pedagogical, personal, professional, and social competence. All in all, to be an effective teacher, student teachers are required to work hard to gradually develop and demonstrate their abilities in various aspects: knowledge, skills, and personality.

To develop teacher competence, Bisschoff and Grobler (1998) proposed eight aspects of teacher competence, namely: 1) the learning environment (which includes various aspects in student assessment, questioning techniques, professional attitude, time management, classroom climate, and cooperative learning); 2) the professional commitment of the teacher (which includes commitments to be an exemplary model, towards valued social ends, and the ethic of caring); 3) discipline; 4) the educational foundation of the teacher (which includes didactic expertise, educational development, and educational aims); 5) teacher reflection; 6) cooperative ability of the teacher; 7) effectiveness (in teaching strategies; curriculum interpretation; and productivity); and 8) leadership style.

In Vietnam, The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) issued Decision No. 16/2008/QĐ-BGDDT dated April 16, 2008, on promulgating the regulation on teaching professional moral standards. This decision lists specific ethical regulations that Vietnamese teachers must comply with (MoET, 2008). Some later legal documents generally do not detail professional moral standards for teachers. Therefore, the standards in Decision No. 16 were used to develop questionnaire items for this study regarding teacher qualities. Generally, the Decision requires teachers to have four domains of teacher qualities, including Political qualities; Professional ethics; Lifestyle, and behaviour.

As regards teacher competencies, the Vietnamese government issued Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW of November 04, 2013, on "Fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education, serving industrialization and modernization in a socialist-oriented market economy during international integration" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013). The Resolution emphasised a need to "transform education from knowledge provision to comprehensive development of

learners in terms of competencies and personal qualities." This is considered a blueprint for all levels of education in Vietnam and for innovating educational programmes.

To implement this Resolution, MoET issued Circular No. 20/2018/TT-BGDDT promulgating the regulation on professionalism for teachers, including the required qualities and competencies of teachers, including teachers' ideology, ethics, lifestyle, and teachers' competencies. MoET also issued the 2018 General Education Curriculum (K12 Curriculum) affirming the educational goal is to develop the qualities and competencies of learners (Circular No. 32/2018/TT-BGDDT). In addition, Directive No. 31/CT-TTg in 2019 by the Prime Minister of Vietnam strengthened moral and lifestyle education for students. Therefore, universities are encouraged to innovate their teaching content and training methods to train student teachers.

In Vietnam, there are studies about student teachers' competencies and how to develop them, yet most of the studies were conducted in the developed cities, for some examples see Nguyen and Truong (2010), Doan (2010), Hoang and Ninh (2017). There is a serious lack of research on the quality of teachers in Vietnam's mountainous regions like the Northwest. To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies about this issue. The Northwest region in Vietnam is one of the most underdeveloped areas in the country, both in education and economy. This is also the place where most of the Vietnamese minority groups live, with very rich and diverse cultures and traditions. Besides, due to the difficulties in the infrastructure and transportation system, this region frequently lacks teachers, let alone qualified ones. Thus, how to develop this region based on education is one of the key strategies that require more attention and actions from educators and the government.

This study, hence, focused on investigating the student teachers' qualities and competencies, as well as surveying their perceptions of the extent to which they met the requirements of the teacher training programmes in participating universities and colleges in Vietnam. This study also compares the results between two groups of students. The first one is students in the first and second years of their study, and the second group is students in the third and fourth years of study.

This study, thus, aims to explore the Vietnamese Northwest student teachers' self-assessment of their personality traits, competencies, and skills as a teacher as well as investigate how the universities and colleges of teacher education in the Northwest of Vietnam developed their student teachers' competencies from the view of these students. Based on the findings, suggestions for MoET and other stakeholders will be offered to improve initial teacher education in this region.

2. Methodology

This study surveyed student teachers on their personality traits, teacher ideology, professional skills, and soft skills that are necessary for a teacher as well as their perceptions on how much their colleges and universities prepared them for these professional competencies and skills.

2.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire included open-ended (O) and rating scales (R) questions as the following:

Q1 (O). Please name the qualities of a teacher that you believe you have already possessed/developed (Table 2).

Q2 (O). Please name the qualities of a teacher that you currently do not have (Table 3).

Q3 (R). From 0 to 10, please rate your professional qualities and competencies as a teacher and the training effectiveness of your university on those aspects (Table 4).

Q4 (R). From 0 to 10, please rate your classroom management competencies and the training effectiveness of your university on those aspects (Table 6).

Q5 (R). From 0 to 10, please rate your abilities to design and use active teaching methods and techniques and the training effectiveness of your university on those aspects (Table 8).

Q6 (R). From 0 to 10, please rate your skills as a teacher in the 21st century and the training effectiveness of your university on those aspects (Table 10).

Q7 (R) From 0 to 3, Please rate the level of contributions of several groups of courses (Table 12) in the curriculum of your universities/colleges in developing your qualities and competencies.

For Q3-6, participants were asked to evaluate their current professional qualities and competencies as a teacher and the quality of the programs they were studying from 0 to 10 (0 meaning not at all and 10 meaning excellent and very effective). For Q7, participants were asked to evaluate the contribution of seven groups of courses from 0 to 3 (High (3), Average (2), Low (1), and Not at all (0)).

2.2. Participants

The study employed a convenience sampling technique, with students from faculties and schools of teacher education in the Northwest region, Vietnam. Emails with links to the questionnaire using Google Forms were sent to all of the student teachers in these universities and colleges. Students voluntarily answered the questionnaire. The survey was taken during August and September 2022.

This study applied the simplified sample size calculation proposed by Yamane (1967, p. 886) which is $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$, in which N = 5,000 student teachers (approximately), e=0.05 (95 % confidence level and p = 0.5). Therefore, the acceptable sample for this study is 370.

A total of 538 student teachers, in five universities and colleges of the Northwest region, Vietnam, particularly in four provinces: Hoa Binh, Son La, Dien Bien, and Lai Chau, responded to the survey, which meets the requirement for statistical analysis. The universities and colleges involved in this study included Tay Bac University (336 student teachers), Lai Chau Community College (42 student teachers), Son La College (61 student teachers), Dien Bien College of Education (48 student teachers), and Hoa Binh College of Education (51 student teachers). Students were coded as P1 (Participant 1) and Pn (Participant n) respectively. Information on the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information about the respondents

Major of teaching	Gender		Year of study				Total
	Male	**Female**	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	
Childhood Education	12	271	7	122	104	50	283
Politics Education	33	25	-	33	10	15	58
English Language Teaching	11	34	-	39	6	-	45
Geography Education	3	30	4	13	13	3	33
Primary Education	6	19	-	9	8	8	25
Computer Science	11	12	-	17	4	2	23
History Education	4	18	1	12	8	1	22
Vietnamese Literature	1	18	-	13	6	-	19
Maths Education	9	11	-	17	2	1	20
Physical Education	9	1	-	9	-	1	10
Total	**99**	**439**	**12**	**284**	**161**	**81**	**538**

Of 538 respondents, only 106 (19.7 %) student teachers are Kinh, the rest of the student teachers (432, 80.3 %) are of other ethnic minority groups in Vietnam. As regards gender, 439 female (81.6 %) and 99 male (18.4 %) student teachers joined the study. Table 1 also shows that 296 are students in their first and second years of study and 242 are in their third and fourth years of study.

2.3. Data analysis

Qualitative data from Q1 and Q2 were coded for themes and patterns and then were grouped into the most common groups of ideas with the frequency of ideas counted. The quantitative data from other questions were analysed using SPSS 20 for descriptive and inferential statistics. Correlations and reliabilities were calculated where relevant.

The independent t-tests were run to examine the differences between the two groups of students. The participants were divided into two groups: 1) Group 1 included 296 1st and 2nd year student teachers (55.20 %) and Group 2 included 242 3rd and 4th year student teachers (44.80 %).

3. Results and discussion
3.1. Personality traits: strengths and limitations
Table 2 displays the result of qualities that participants believed they already possessed when answering question Q1 listed from the most frequent to the least frequent ones. These are summarised from the narratives written by student teachers.

Table 2. Personality traits articulated

No.	Themes as qualities	N	%
1	Love, enthusiasm, and passion for the profession	207	38.48
2	Love and enthusiasm for students	173	32.16
3	Having appropriate ethical qualities	119	22.12
4	Having the desire and spirit to learn and practice to perfect oneself	71	13.20
5	Being hard-working, diligent, patient, and having the ability to manage emotions	68	12.64
6	Having fairness, integrity, and honesty	65	12.08
7	Being responsible, self-disciplined, dedicated, and enthusiastic	53	9.85
8	Being open-minded, sociable, friendly, and gentle	31	5.76
9	Being exemplary and disciplined	27	5.02
10	Having knowledge and understanding of the job	21	3.90
11	Having compassion, humanity, altruism, and tolerance	20	3.72
12	Having professional skills	15	2.79

Table 2 shows that for the participants, the most common qualities they possessed were love, enthusiasm, and passion for the job itself (38.48 %). Some of them wrote:

"I am passionate about teaching" (P55)
"I love the job with all my heart" (P37)
"I am dedicated and devoted to the job" (P102)

The second most common quality they mentioned was the love and enthusiasm for their students (32.16 %). Some pre-service students wrote, "Love children" (P1), "Care for children" (P44), or "Love children and educate with love" (P42). A student wrote very sincerely: "I love children, so I'm controlling my own temper. My study let me understand that the teaching profession is very sacred, essential for the young generations of the country" (P158). Another study wrote, "When I came to the university, my lecturers told me that I would have many challenges in teaching because teaching is not an easy job. A teacher's responsibility is very high and important, so I have not stopped trying and learning every day to improve myself" (P23). The result was very rewarding for the colleges and universities of these students when most of the participating students believed that they had developed several important qualities of a teacher. These qualities are core values for a devoted teacher in the future.

The other qualities that they believed they developed during their studies were ethical issues, a desire and spirit to perfect themselves, hard work, diligence, patience, fairness, integrity, honesty, and many other good virtues as presented in Table 2.

The results show that participating student teachers in this study believed that they possessed relevant qualities of being a teacher. However, most of the responses focused on professional ethics and lifestyle, and behaviour. The participants did not write anything related to the political qualities of teachers. Although politics modules are mandatory, they are not only for the initial teacher education programmes but also for all educational programmes in Vietnam. Hence, the role of these modules in developing the political qualities of teachers seems either to be vague or obvious. There has been much discussion around teaching and learning these modules in the Vietnamese context when Vietnamese student teachers expressed their dislike or boredom studying politics courses. The results of this study suggest that Vietnamese teacher education universities reform their politics courses in a way that student teachers can connect the values of these courses to form their political qualities.

In this study, 22 of the participants (4.09 %), most of them in the second and third year of study, could not name any qualities of a teacher that they have developed. This revealed a certain level of uncertainty in their studies as well as their future job. It can also be inferred that a certain number of those student teachers do not possess suitable personal qualities and that the teacher training programmes failed to equip a small proportion of student teachers with the necessary professional moral standards. This small number can become a big issue later for these students as well as for the future quality of education because the personal traits of teachers should be the utmost matter in education.

These are the most basic qualities of a teacher because the teaching profession is the profession of working with people. In addition to teaching knowledge, teachers also have to teach people to form personalities and inspire and spread the wings of dreams for students so that they believe in themselves and be successful citizens in the future. These are very necessary qualities that student teachers have recognized and possessed. However, it will take a long time for them to practise and improve, especially in reality, to perfect and affirm the above qualities. Above all, student teachers need to have the effort and spirit of lifelong learning, passion, and creativity, so that they can cultivate more ethical qualities, and professional expertise and continue to grow in a changing society that greatly impacts education as it is today.

The finding in this study is similar to the result of Arnon and Reichel (2007) which indicated that students mutually attributed great importance to the personal qualities of the ideal teacher. Most of the qualities belong to the "Big Five personality domains" of teacher personality (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability) as concluded by a meta-analysis of Kim et al. (2019a, p. 163). Moreover, the results were in great accordance with the findings from Huynh et al. (2023) who found that Vietnamese student teachers in early childhood education had certain important qualities and ethics embodied in STEAM educational activities.

With the open-ended question Q2, the participants also provided their shortcomings. The results are summarised in Table 3 from the most common limitations to the less common ones.

Table 3. Student teachers' self-reports of the qualities that they did not possess

Themes	N	%	Sub-themes	N	%
Personal qualities	244	45.35	Shy/lack of confidence	96	17.84
			Not diligent	35	6.51
			Not active	30	5.58
			Other qualities (fairness, humility, honesty, courage, bravery, optimism, calmness, tolerance, creativity…)	28	4.83
			Lack of patience	18	3.35
			Lack of determination and effort	14	2.60
			Short-tempered/lack of control	12	2.23
			Lack of concentration	6	1.12
			Not exemplary	5	0.93
Professional skills	125	23.23	Lack of professional skills (in general)	52	9.67
			Lack of communication skills	30	5.58
			Lack of pedagogical situation-handling skills	18	3.35
			Lack of other professional skills (program design, child care, class management, leadership, assessment…)	15	2.79
			Lack of teaching skills	10	1.86
Professional knowledge	95	17.66	Lack of professional knowledge and experience	95	17.66
Personal goals	52	9.67	Not well studying and practicing, have not achieved personal goals	52	8.29
Attitude towards the job and the students	30	5.58	Do not love the job	14	2.60
			Lack of devotion to the job	14	2.60
			Do not love children	2	0.37
Unknown	81	15.06	Don't have or don't know	67	12.45
			Lack a lot (unspecified)	14	2.60

A few percent of participants admitted the limitation in attitudes (5.58 %) and qualities (45.35 %). Particularly, some of them admitted that they did not love the job, or even did not love children, and lacked devotion to the job.

Among personal qualities, lack of confidence was the most popular limitation of these pre-service teachers (17.84 %). The results confirmed a view by Nguyen and Hoang (2019) that

educating qualities and ethics of teachers is an urgent requirement for students of teacher education schools these days, specifically for preschool teachers as pointed out by Nguyen (2019).

Professional knowledge and professional skills were also a challenge of 17.66 % and 23.23 % of participants respectively. Although it is understandable because they are still students, tertiary educators should pay attention to students' opinions on training programs, to better satisfy the learners' needs. This problem, unfortunately, was indicated a long time ago by Tran (2013) and remains these days.

Interestingly, 67 student teachers did not know their limitations (27 student teachers) or reflected themselves as "do not have any limitations" (40 student teachers). Both of these groups show a weak ability to reflect on self-development. The results directed the need for counselling and career orientation in high schools, to detect the students who are suitable for pedagogy. Not all pedagogical students choose to study this profession because of their love and qualities for the major. For instance, Tran et al. (2023) indicated that many first-year pedagogical students in Vietnam were not motivated to study (p. 239). This was quite disappointing because being an effective teacher in Vietnam requires much motivation and devotion when the salary for the job was considered low so far.

In sum, most of the participants in the Northwest region, Vietnam reported that they have developed a love of teaching and other suitable abilities as teachers. Nevertheless, they also reported a lack of confidence and professional knowledge and skills, which directed the need for more effective training. The reported shortcomings fall into the main six qualities of a teacher to perform effective teaching as reviewed by Stronge (2018, p. 11), including professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment, learning environment, and professionalism. This finding can be viewed as a positive result because only when the student teacher can identify their weaknesses, they can know what needs to be concentrated, practiced, and improved.

3.2. Self-assessment of teacher qualities and competencies and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum in the Northwest region
Professional qualities and competencies as a teacher

The results in the student teachers' professional qualities and competencies as a teacher are reported below:

Table 4. Self-reported qualities and the training quality of the universities

Themes	Teacher qualities	Self-assessment (A)		Evaluation of training (B)		Pearson Correlation[*]	Difference (B – A)
		M (A)	SD	M (B)	SD		
Attitude towards the job and the students (α_A = 0.963; (α_B = 0.961)	Passion for teaching	6.98	2.549	7.04	2.622	.824	0.06
	Love your students	7.44	2.607	7.28	2.618	.857	-0.16
	Feeling happy and joyful when interacting with children	7.40	2.609	7.32	2.575	.868	-0.08
	Want students to improve	8.01	2.615	7.70	2.612	.890	-0.31
Personal qualities (α_A = 0.971; (α_B = 0.964)	Be tolerant and compassionate towards students	7.70	2.622	7.57	2.638	.882	-0.13
	High responsibility in work	7.50	2.549	7.34	2.614	.852	-0.16
	Teacher's sense of responsibility	7.67	2.523	7.58	2.548	.915	-0.09
	Innovative, fun, and active	7.73	2.553	7.62	2.586	.886	-0.11
	Have a professional conscience	7.55	2.590	7.34	2.615	.862	-0.21
Professional behaviours (α_A = 0.977;	Know how to educate students appropriately	7.56	2.545	7.54	2.596	.871	-0.02
	Treat students fairly	7.75	2.571	7.45	2.550	.847	-0.30

(α_B = 0.971)	All for the students although being strict	7.75	2.642	7.57	2.620	.895	-0.18
	Simple and friendly lifestyle	7.47	2.612	7.29	2.633	.865	-0.18
	Caring, sharing, trusting, supporting and tolerant among individuals	7.61	2.530	7.45	2.605	.879	-0.16
	Respect diversity and differences	7.83	2.552	7.62	2.586	.885	-0.21
Effort and practice (α_A = 0.982; (α_B = 0.971)	Maintain teacher ethics	7.94	2.572	7.75	2.575	.934	-0.19
	Never stop learning and training yourself to be a better teacher	7.88	2.573	7.69	2.611	.897	-0.19
	Dare to defend what is right, condemn what is bad	7.81	2.608	7.65	2.592	.921	-0.16
	Cherished and fostered the love in education day by day	7.73	2.578	7.54	2.586	.889	-0.19
	Average	**7.65**	**2.579**	**7.49**	**2.599**	**0.880**	**-0.16**

Note: α: Conbrach's alpha α_A = self-assessment, α_B = evaluation of training

Table 4 illustrates that participants assessed most of their personal qualities as "Good" (6.98-7.94). Only one quality scored 8.01 (very good) (want students to improve). For the training quality, the scores range from 7.04 to 7.75 (a "good" level). The result also shows that the student teachers self-rated their qualities higher than the extent to which the training at their universities has contributed to these qualities. It is then necessary to evaluate the current study programmes so that they can contribute significantly to developing some required qualities for teachers. It is noted that numerous studies have shown that personality traits are one of the most influential factors that drive academic performance (Hazrati-Viari et al., 2012; Karatas, 2015). It will be almost impossible to train someone "from zero to hero" in just four years, especially in teacher education. Therefore, a careful selection of candidates for teacher education majors could be another resolution to develop teachers' qualities.

Table 5 illustrates the differences between the two groups in their self-assessment of self-reported qualities.

Table 5 shows that there was a significant difference between the two groups in seven surveyed aspects, and the results of the first group are higher than the second one. A further study is needed to explore possible explanations of the result of why third-year and fourth-year students "self-evaluated" their qualities as teachers lowered than the first- and second-year students did.

Table 5. The differences between the two groups in their self-assessment of self-reported qualities

Themes	Teacher qualities	Group 1	Group 2	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Attitude towards the job and the students	Passion for teaching	7.077	6.855	1.008	536	0.314
	Love your students	7.593	7.253	1.504	536	0.133
	Feeling happy and joyful when interacting with children	7.694	7.046	2.884	536	0.004
	Want students to improve	8.121	7.863	1.139	536	0.255
Personal qualities	Be tolerant and compassionate towards students	7.929	7.423	1.083	536	0.279
	High responsibility in work	7.603	7.369	1.668	536	0.096
	Teacher's sense of responsibility	7.845	7.444	2.198	536	0.028
	Innovative, fun, and active	7.882	7.548	2.258	536	0.024
Professional behaviours	Have a professional conscience	7.694	7.378	2.234	536	0.026
	Know how to educate students appropriately	7.751	7.315	1.056	536	0.291

	Treat students fairly	7.899	7.560	1.838	536	0.067
	All for the students although being strict	7.926	7.531	1.513	536	0.131
	Simple and friendly lifestyle	7.657	7.249	1.409	536	0.159
	Caring, sharing, trusting, supporting and tolerant among individuals	7.758	7.436	2.031	536	0.043
Effort and practice	Respect diversity and differences	7.936	7.689	1.260	536	0.208
	Maintain teacher ethics	8.098	7.751	2.005	536	0.045
	Never stop learning and training yourself to be a better teacher	8.040	7.693	1.329	536	0.184
	Dare to defend what is right, condemn what is bad	7.953	7.643	1.075	536	0.283
	Cherished and fostered the love in education day by day	7.855	7.581	2.234	536	0.026

Classroom management competencies

The participants' current ability to organise classes and the training quality of the universities were reported in Table 6.

Table 6. Classroom management competencies

Knowledge and skills in classroom management	Self-assessment (A)		Evaluation of the programme (B)		Pearson Correlation *	Difference (B – A)
	M(A)	SD	M (B)	SD		
Know how to set classroom rules	7.22	2.544	7.35	2.601	.866	0.13
Know how to observe children's activity and attract children's attention	7.54	2.488	7.54	2.494	.863	0.00
Know how to organise collective activities	7.53	2.478	7.55	2.552	.856	0.02
Can connect and build relationships with students in the spirit of respect, listening and understanding	7.41	2.533	7.41	2.571	.866	0.00
Can encourage students to actively participate in classroom activities	7.51	2.526	7.52	2.531	.860	0.01
Can assign tasks to students and manage time when assigning tasks	7.49	2.473	7.45	2.551	.867	-0.04
Can build positive relationships with parents for effective classroom management	7.50	2.485	7.49	2.502	.869	-0.01
Average	**7.39**	**2.496**	**7.44**	**2.554**	**0.847**	**0.04**

Table 6 shows that for classroom management competencies, the lowest evaluation was for knowledge (know how to set classroom rules: 7.22) whereas all other aspects were approximately 7.50 (a good level). For the contribution of the training to these aspects, the results were also at a "good" level (M= 7.35 to 7.55). The differences between the self-reported competencies and how the training at the universities contributed to their development of these competencies were also the same.

Table 7 displays the differences in self-assessment between the two groups for classroom management knowledge and skills.

Table 7. Differences between the two groups of students in classroom management knowledge and skills

Knowledge and skills in classroom management	1st & 2nd year students	3rd & 4th year students	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Know how to set classroom rules	7.431	6.950	2.188	536	**0.029**
Know how to observe children's activity and attract children's attention	7.747	7.290	2.126	536	**0.034**
Know how to organise collective activities	7.751	7.253	2.326	536	**0.020**
Can connect and build relationships with students in the spirit of respect, listening and understanding	7.623	7.158	2.126	536	**0.034**
Can encourage students to actively participate in classroom activities	7.734	7.224	2.338	536	**0.020**
Can assign tasks to students and manage time when assigning tasks	7.646	7.307	1.585	536	0.114
Can build positive relationships with parents for effective classroom management	7.704	7.253	2.098	536	**0.036**

The result illustrates that students in the third and fourth years of study were less confident in their classroom management knowledge and skills than the first and second-year students. Perhaps first-year and second-year students thought it was "easy" to teach. However, when they are in their third and fourth year of study, they are taught to develop these competencies and start feeling that classroom management is not such "easy."

In sum, the results show that participants believed they were good at knowledge and skills in classroom organisation. The results also indicate that the training somewhat met the expectations of the students. Since the MoET issued a new curriculum (MoET, 2018), the skills to organise learners' activities, design and use active teaching methods and techniques, and other necessary skills are crucial for a teacher able to implement the curriculum. Consequently, teacher education universities, including the participating ones in this study, are required to reform their curricula and training activities to prepare undergraduates so that they are more confident in their teaching careers regarding these knowledge and skills.

Competencies to design and use active teaching methods and techniques
Table 8 reports the results of students' self-assessments and their evaluation of the training.

Table 8. Self-assessment and evaluation of the training for competencies to design and use active teaching methods and techniques

Items	Self-assessment		Evaluation of the training		Pearson Correlation*	Difference (B − A)
	M(A)	SD	M(B)	SD		
Improving traditional teaching methods	7.22	2.521	7.49	2.597	.847	0.27
Combining a variety of traditional and modern teaching methods	7.34	2.524	7.31	2.595	.856	-0.03
Strengthen the use of appropriate teaching aids and information technology to support teaching	7.45	2.452	7.39	2.560	.854	-0.06
Use teaching techniques to promote positivity and creativity	7.44	2.519	7.46	2.533	.841	0.02

Focus on subject-specific teaching methods	7.42	2.459	7.51	2.532	.845	0.09
Fostering active learning methods for students	7.49	2.499	7.46	2.509	.838	-0.03
Average	**7.39**	**2.496**	**7.44**	**2.554**	**0.847**	**0.04**

The self-assessment scores ranged from 7.22 to 7.49 whereas for the effectiveness of the training for these competencies, the scores were from 7.31 to 7.51. There was no significant difference in the overall scoring level for the self-assessment and the participants' evaluation of the effectiveness of the training of these competencies, and all of them can be interpreted as at a "good" level.

Table 9 presents the results of differences between the two groups of students in competencies related to the design and use of active teaching methods and techniques.

Table 9. Differences between two groups of students in competencies to design and use active teaching methods and techniques

Competencies to design and use active teaching methods and techniques	Group 1	Group 2	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Improving traditional teaching methods	7.421	6.983	2.007	536	**0.045**
Combining a variety of traditional and modern teaching methods	7.532	7.104	1.962	536	**0.050**
Strengthen the use of appropriate teaching aids and information technology to support teaching	7.640	7.216	2.000	536	**0.046**
Use teaching techniques to promote positivity and creativity	7.636	7.191	2.046	536	**0.041**
Focus on subject-specific teaching methods	7.640	7.145	2.329	536	**0.020**
Fostering active learning methods for students	7.704	7.224	2.326	510.964	**0.020**

Similar to classroom management knowledge and skills, Group 1 students were more confident in their competencies to design and use active teaching methods and techniques. It is expected that the training will help student teachers to develop these competencies. However, the result shows the opposite. The differences were significant for all aspects surveyed.

Skills of a teacher in the 21st century

Regarding some skills that are essential for 21st century teachers, students were slightly less confident than other surveyed qualities and competencies, albeit also at a good level. For the self-assessment, the results were from 7.11-7.36 and 7.34-7.47 for the quality of training. The results for the effectiveness of the training were higher (at an average of 0.17).

Table 10. Teacher skills in the 21st century

Skills	Self-assessment		Evaluation of the training		Pearson Correlation *	Difference (B – A)
	M(A)	SD	M (B)	SD		
Self-awareness skills	7.36	2.538	7.37	2.436	.868	0.01
Learning and self-study skills	7.15	2.490	7.34	2.442	.863	0.19
Communication skills	7.14	2.515	7.40	2.424	.860	0.26
Teamwork skills	7.35	2.446	7.40	2.400	.866	0.05
Critical Thinking and Creativity	7.11	2.487	7.40	2.411	.833	0.29
Problem Solving skills	7.17	2.472	7.40	2.428	.851	0.23

Emotion Control skills	7.32	2.477	7.47	2.400	.861	0.15
Average	**7.23**	**2.489**	**7.40**	**2.420**	**0.857**	**0.17**

These skills are crucial for modern teachers (Astuti et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019b; Frenzel et al., 2021). Kim et al. (2019b) highlighted the notion of "teachers as learners" and other related qualities such as self-awareness, collaboration, and critical thinking, problem-solving as key competencies for sustainable development. These skills also require more attention from the participating institutions in this study.

Table 11 illustrates the differences between the two groups in these skills. Interestingly, there were no significant differences between the two groups of students in the surveyed skills in the 21st century.

Table 11. Differences between the two groups in self-assessment of teacher skills in the 21st century

21st-century skills	Group 1	Group 2	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Self-awareness	7.468	7.228	1.090	536	0.276
Learning and self-study	7.327	6.942	1.786	536	0.075
Communication	7.306	6.929	1.732	536	0.084
Teamwork	7.485	7.178	1.446	536	0.149
Critical thinking and creativity	7.246	6.946	1.391	536	0.165
Problem-solving	7.296	7.004	1.365	536	0.173
Emotion control	7.498	7.104	1.841	536	0.066

3.3. Contributions of seven groups of courses to the teacher education curriculum

In Vietnam, student teachers are trained with seven groups of course in the curriculum: 1) Politics and Philosophy, 2) Pedagogy and Psychology, 3) Education management, 4) Teaching Theory and Subject Teaching Methods, 5) Practicum, 6) Professional Ethics, and 7) Soft skills. This study also asked students to evaluate the contribution of these groups of courses to the development of their qualities and competencies. The results are displayed in Table 12.

Table 12. Contributions of the curriculum to the development of teachers' qualities and competencies

Group of courses	Level of contribution	
	Mean	SD
Politics and Philosophy	2.27	.755
Pedagogy and Psychology	2.54	.737
Education Management	2.31	.808
Teaching Theory and Subject Teaching Methods	2.48	.788
Practicum	2.59	.739
Professional Ethics	2.60	.736
Soft skills	2.62	.706

The results show that Politics and Philosophy courses were rated lowest. Although Politics and Philosophy are compulsory subjects in all of Vietnam's university curricula, students in this study believed that they contributed the least to the student teachers' competencies. The second group of courses with the lowest mean was Education Management (2.31). Since these are general and fundamental courses, it is understandable why students were less aware of the importance of these courses to the curriculum. This could mean that further communication is needed so that students can be more aware of the contribution of these courses to developing their qualities and competencies of teachers.

The groups of courses that were believed to contribute the most were practicum (2.62), professional ethics (2.62), and soft skills (2.65). These courses are "specialised courses" so that students can see the direct connection and contribution of these courses to the development of their professional competencies.

There are many spaces for improvement in all these aspects since a wide range of actions can be taken for student teachers to develop these qualities and competencies at a higher level of confidence. This is also linked to the effectiveness of educational training.

In sum, this study show that for these three main domains that were assessed by the student teachers, none of the competencies and their components had a score of very good level and higher. The same was applied to the training quality of the universities. The results can be seen as positive. The results also show there were significant differences between the two groups of students in their self-assessment on some aspects of competencies. Generally, the 1st- and 2nd-year students tend to be more confident in the surveyed qualities and competencies than the 3rd- and 4th-year students were. For some qualities and competencies, the differences between the two groups of students were not significant. The interesting results can be found with skills of being a teacher in the 21st century, which were similar for the two groups and slightly lower than other qualities and competencies of a teacher.

4. Conclusion

The participating student teachers in the Northwest Region of Vietnam self-reported that they had competencies in many aspects of being a "good teacher" including teacher ideology and qualities, professional skills, and necessary soft skills. Most of them articulated rather clearly their strengths and limitations in teacher qualities. However, there was a small number of student teachers did not answer this question in the survey. Some Vietnamese student teachers chose the career not based on their own will, interests, and characteristics but based on other external reasons including free tuition fees, their parents' choice, or simply because they failed the entrance exam for other majors. Therefore, this should be a remarkable point for stakeholders to plan and develop a better admission procedure to choose suitable candidates for this very important career.

The student's evaluation of the effectiveness of the training was at a good level on average. Yet no particular aspect was evaluated with an excellent level. Noticeably, several compulsory courses in the curriculum received lower appreciation from the student teachers. Further research is needed to search for insight into this issue: whether these are fundamental courses, hence the link to the development of students' competencies is not always explicit or clear, or because of the other issues related to the quality of teaching and learning these courses.

This study provided a general picture of how student teachers in the Northwest Region of Vietnam self-assessed their qualities and competencies related to the teaching profession. However, the data relied much on the student teachers' self-evaluation, without observation of their real behaviours which is the limitation of the current study. Further studies should be conducted to investigate the real-life behaviours and competencies of these participants. A follow-up qualitative study is also needed to explore and provide explanations of the results found in this study.

5. Acknowledgements

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