Teacher policies in Southeast Asia: A comprehensive review and recommendations for Vietnam

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Abstract: The effectiveness of the educational system depends on the ability of its teachers, and this ability is greatly influenced by the quality of the regulations that control their working conditions. This study systematically analyzes teacher policies in specific Southeast Asian countries, particularly Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore, with a particular focus on the current situation in Vietnam. This research focuses on performing a thorough examination of several aspects of teacher policies, including recruiting, training, salary, and professional development. Based on international examples and current research, this study proposes a detailed strategy to strengthen teacher policies in Vietnam. A primary recommendation is the proposal of a comprehensive Teacher Law, which would provide clear rules, ethical principles, and legal frameworks for educators. The promotion of decentralized administration, recruitment based on merit, and the strategic allocation of teachers is encouraged to address inequalities in distribution. The report recommends a significant investment in continuous professional development programs to guarantee that teachers stay updated on new teaching methods and technology breakthroughs. The significance of offering competitive remuneration, performance-based incentives, and an equitable teacher evaluation system is emphasized as a crucial element in attracting and retaining top-tier educators. This study emphasizes the importance of an open and helpful evaluation procedure that promotes ongoing professional development. This research aims to establish the foundation for the Vietnamese government to enhance its teacher policies, therefore stimulating advancements in the education system and crafting a more promising national future.

Keywords: education system, professional development, recruitment, compensation, teacher assessment, teacher law

1. Introduction

The quality of an education system is closely interconnected with the caliber of its teachers. Nevertheless, the impact of teachers is limited by the caliber of the policies that shape their work environment and influence their hiring, recruitment, and professional growth (OECD, 2005). Examining the methodologies employed by accomplished educational institutions and systems in the process of choosing, attracting, and nurturing educators might reveal impactful teacher policies.

Teacher policies refer to the rules and guidelines that govern the actions of teachers at both the school and education system levels. These policies have an impact on the composition of the teaching workforce and the specific responsibilities of teachers (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023). The paper titled "Teacher Policies Around the World" by the World Bank offers a complete framework for comprehending worldwide teacher policies, with the objective of improving the quality of education. The policies encompass various aspects, such as the requirements for entering and remaining in the teaching profession, the training of new teachers, the process of recruiting and assigning teachers, the workload and level of independence given to teachers, their professional development, the incentives and compensation they receive, the regulations regarding retirement, the supervision and evaluation of teacher quality, the representation of teachers, and the leadership within schools (The World Bank, 2010).

The World Bank (2013) published a report titled "What Matters Most for Teacher Policies: A Framework Paper", which outlines eight key objectives. These objectives include setting clear expectations for teachers, attracting highly skilled individuals to the teaching profession, ensuring that teachers are well prepared and experienced, aligning teacher skills with the needs of students, promoting effective leadership by competent principals, implementing robust evaluation systems for teaching and learning, providing support for teachers to enhance the quality of their teaching, and enhancing motivation among teachers.

OECD (2005) focuses on policies pertaining to the "attraction, recruitment, development, and retention of proficient educators." In addition, Jackson et al. (2014) outline crucial teacher policies that encompass recruiting, assignment, salary,
evaluation, promotion, and retention. In general, teacher policies can be categorized into five primary groups: training and growth, incentives for professional and career advancement, policies that affect the need for teachers (such as class size, teaching hours, and schedules), management policies that influence teacher positions, and school practices that impact teacher responsibilities (OECD, 2018).

Surveys conducted among teachers regularly indicate that intrinsic rewards, such as the opportunity to engage with children and make a positive impact on society, are the main driving forces. According to the OECD (2005), characteristics such as employment security, remuneration, and working hours are considered less important than other factors. An analysis conducted by the OECD (2018) indicates that in countries where teachers’ pay grew at a faster rate than overall economic growth (GDP), there was a notable increase in the level of interest in pursuing teaching careers. Nevertheless, it also acknowledges a decrease in the comparative achievement of students who anticipate pursuing teaching professions in those nations.

Multiple studies utilize student achievement statistics and school environment assessments to emphasize the ability of schools and education systems to provide exceptional, fair, and comprehensive education (Jackson et al., 2014; OECD, 2005, 2018). The outcomes are shaped by various factors, with teacher policies acting as the cornerstone for this achievement.

Significantly, there are several important exclusions in the study, including regulations pertaining to teachers’ time management, the distinct career progression for educators in different countries, and the organizational elements of schools, such as their culture, information sharing, and interpersonal connections (OECD, 2017b). The prioritization of school autonomy in the recruitment, remuneration, and dismissal of teachers is highlighted; however, it can result in discrepancies in the credentials and experience of teachers among schools. To effectively address these risks, it is necessary to meticulously choose and train school administrators while also allocating extra resources to less desirable areas (OECD, 2005).

To summarize, a multitude of studies underscore the substantial influence of teacher policies on both education systems and individual teachers. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research regarding the implementation of teacher policies in Vietnam. The objective of this study is to consolidate the favorable and unfavorable consequences of teacher policies in Southeast Asian nations, including Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia, while assessing the present state of affairs in Vietnam. This serves as a basis for suggesting strategies to enhance teacher policies in Vietnam.

2. A Review of Teacher Policies in Thailand

Thailand’s commitment to improving its education system is clearly demonstrated by its comprehensive approach to professional development. The country has placed high importance on regularly reviewing and updating the curriculum in response to the changing nature of education. This has resulted in the development of new standards for teachers and school administrators (Inprasitha, 2018). This curriculum creation approach ensures that educators improve their skills to accommodate the evolving educational environment, promoting flexibility and applicability.

Thailand has implemented a thorough professional development strategy to strengthen the skills and talents of its educators, in addition to making changes to the curriculum. This progressive approach clearly outlines the fundamental skills necessary for providing exceptional education. Thailand is actively fostering teaching staff that are both highly trained and capable of meeting the different requirements of students by customizing professional development programs to focus on these competencies (Inprasitha, 2018). Thailand’s commitment to developing a group of educators who are well equipped to handle the difficulties of modern education is evident in this forward-thinking strategy.

Thailand’s educational policies prioritize addressing educational disparities, demonstrating the government’s dedication to promoting an equal and inclusive education system. Concerted efforts have focused on attracting, maintaining, and providing support to educators in schools catering to difficult circumstances for pupils (Teerakapibal, 2019). Significantly, the government has enacted advantageous policies in particular regions, such as border areas and remote rural sites, to establish conducive circumstances for teachers. The provision of financial perks, such as deferred automobile payment plans and tax deductions, plays a crucial role in facilitating the assimilation of teachers into these communities and fostering stability in their assignments (Chitchanok, 2021).

The Thai government has made significant investments in schools situated in border areas and distant rural regions, acknowledging the essential role of infrastructure and equipment in establishing favorable learning environments (Sriwattana, 2017). The purpose of these investments is to improve facilities and offer essential resources, enabling instructors to fulfill their duties efficiently. Thailand aims to establish conditions that allow educators to concentrate on providing high-quality education without being impeded by infrastructure constraints.

Thailand’s dedication to teachers is reinforced by its compensation laws, which involve a yearly automatic increase in teachers’ salaries as per set regulations (OECD, 2018). This provides concrete and timely motivation, not only recognizing the commitment of educators but also enhancing their financial stability. The purpose of the automatic annual increment is to mitigate financial difficulties, enabling teachers to focus more attentively on their teaching duties. Consequently, this has a beneficial effect on overall job satisfaction and performance, promoting motivated and committed teaching personnel.

Notwithstanding these praiseworthy endeavors, Thailand encounters obstacles in its teaching policies that necessitate meticulous deliberation. Sriwattana (2017) uncovers a consistent geographical disparity, where a lack of competent
instructors in impoverished regions negatively impacts fair access to high-quality education. Chitchanok (2021) highlighted the importance of employing sophisticated approaches to address motivational challenges, acknowledging their pivotal role in guaranteeing the provision of high-quality teaching (Wong, 2018). Wannapireun et al. (2019) found that obsolete teaching methods may indicate a lack of effective policy implementation in adopting contemporary pedagogies. Limna and Tandayya (2018) study on resource allocation difficulties highlights the necessity of strategic planning in this field. Overall, these studies highlight the complex difficulties presented by teacher policies in Thailand, underlining the continuous need for study and policy modifications to improve their overall influence on education.

3. A Review of Teacher Policies in Indonesia

Prior to the implementation of the Teacher Law in 2005, the Indonesian Ministry of National Education recognized certain deficiencies in the education system pertaining to teachers, as summarized by The World Bank (2014). The challenges can be summarized as follows:

At first, the teaching standards lacked sufficient specificity and clarity, posing difficulties in integrating them into the curriculum of several teacher education institutes throughout Indonesia. The management system for teachers in Indonesia exhibited inefficiency because of the lack of teacher certification, beyond mere test performance, resulting in disorganized procedures for the selection, assignment, and professional growth of new instructors. The requirements for these systems exhibited a lack of consistency over time and throughout areas, frequently relying on personal connections rather than training or professional aptitude, especially for temporary and contract teachers.

Furthermore, in accordance with regulations, the responsibility for teacher recruitment, remuneration (except for Islamic schools), standards, activity monitoring, and the enforcement of punitive measures and remedies was intended to shift from the Ministry of National Education to district offices. Nevertheless, there were delays and overlaps in the execution of policies related to the adoption of incentives, terminations, and the relocation of teachers, both within and outside of districts.

In addition, in comparison to other occupations, teacher incomes were comparatively modest, hence adding to their diminished social standing. Consequently, individuals with advanced academic degrees were deterred from pursuing a career in teaching due to the lack of appeal and the preference for more demanding and higher-paying job prospects. The perceived influence of compensation on teacher conduct and drive resulted in instances where teachers sought additional employment, hence exacerbating the rate of teacher turnover.

Ultimately, there was a widespread occurrence of excessive teacher recruitment, largely due to decentralization. This gave local governments a strong incentive to hire more teachers, regardless of whether it was essential. Consequently, the student-to-teacher ratio across the country was low; however, the allocation was unequal and inefficient, resulting in a scarcity of educators in several schools, particularly in rural and isolated regions. All schools nationwide face difficulties in retaining highly skilled teachers.

Recently, a significant amount of research has been dedicated to enhancing teacher policies in Indonesia. Professional development options have become essential for enhancing the expertise of instructors. Sukmadinata (2017) underscores the favorable influence of ongoing professional growth, emphasizing its crucial function in improving pedagogical proficiency. In addition, (Wijaya et al., 2020) emphasize the efficacy of incentives in luring highly skilled teachers to underprivileged areas. Providing financial assistance and chances for career progression plays a crucial role in promoting a fairer allocation of educators, hence encouraging educational parity. A study conducted by Nurhadi and Lubis (2019) explored the benefits of enhanced teacher assessment procedures. Performance assessments and peer reviews are recognized as essential elements that promote a culture of excellence and responsibility. A study conducted by Santoso et al. (2023) emphasized the favorable outcomes that arise from policies advocating for the incorporation of digital tools in Indonesian schools. This integration not only equips students for the digital era but also aids teachers in adjusting to contemporary teaching approaches. These studies offer a thorough perspective on the significant advancements that teacher policies in Indonesia have achieved, thereby contributing to the promotion of education quality in the country.

4. A Review of Teacher Policies in Singapore

Recently, educational policymakers in Singapore have acknowledged the importance of honoring and enhancing the professional status of teachers to establish teaching as a highly regarded profession. Singapore has deliberately implemented legislative measures that prioritize the careful selection, rigorous training, fair compensation, and continuous development of teachers (Ng, 2008).

The Singaporean government and the Ministry of Education have enacted diverse measures to allure highly skilled persons with a fervor for the teaching profession. For example, the Ministry of Education meticulously chooses prospective educators from among the highest-ranking thirds of high school graduates (Choo, 2017). In addition, third-year preservice education students are granted a stipend for up to 60% of a teacher’s salary, which serves as an indication of their dedication to the field of education (Ng, 2019).
Annually, the Ministry of Education evaluates the initial compensation for newly hired teachers, guaranteeing that the teaching profession stays appealing to fresh graduates in comparison to other occupations (Choo, 2017). Teachers receive 100 hours of professional development annually, and each school has funds to support teachers' growth. This includes opportunities for self-directed learning to improve professional skills and participation in both local and international training programs (Breeding et al., 2020). Schools provide international excursions for educators to investigate, cooperate, acquire knowledge, and develop an understanding of educational systems, promoting a global outlook (Ng, 2019).

In addition, teacher effectiveness is assessed yearly by multiple evaluators using a range of criteria. These criteria include the teacher's impact on the academic and character development of all students, their collaboration with parents and community organizations, and their contributions to their colleagues and the overall school (Ng, 2019). Exceptional educators are awarded incentives from the school's incentive fund (Choo, 2017).

In Singapore, instructors are periodically reassigned to various schools every 5-7 years, hence reducing the significance of specific school assignments for educators (Ng, 2019). Following a three-year teaching experience, teachers attend an evaluation process to ascertain their prospects for career advancement. This assessment includes the options of becoming a senior teacher, a curriculum or education research specialist, or a school leader (Breeding et al., 2020). Aspiring teachers with the potential to become leaders receive training to equip them for their upcoming jobs (Choo, 2017).

The National Institute of Education (NIE) at Nanyang Technological University is the exclusively approved institution responsible for the education and training of teachers. It offers comprehensive programs leading to bachelor's and master's degrees (Ng, 2019). The rigorous selection procedure in Singapore emphasizes the identification of exceptional individuals who satisfy the criteria established by specialized university programs (Breeding et al., 2020). The Ministry of Education assesses the yearly need for teachers and enlists the appropriate number of education students (Choo, 2017). In addition, the NIE presents a more comprehensive perspective on teachers' responsibilities, emphasizing their role as a protector of values and a facilitator of learning and community development within Singaporean society (Ng, 2019).

Teachers who perform in their profession are honored with national recognition, such as the President's Award and the Caring Teacher Award (Breeding et al., 2020). These activities leverage the innate drive of experienced teachers and are a crucial component of the incentive package designed to motivate highly accomplished educators (Choo, 2017).

Singapore has implemented deliberate policies in several areas, such as recruitment, training, professional development, and career support, to attract and retain top-notch talent while also offering ongoing assistance and incentives. As a result, Singapore has successfully avoided significant shortages in its teaching workforce or any inefficiencies among instructors, hence maintaining a strong and efficient education system (Ng, 2019). The country's dedication to ongoing enhancement and acknowledgment of teachers' work serves as an exemplary model for fostering an effective educational setting.

5. The Present State of Teacher Policy in Vietnam

The Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam demonstrates a clear dedication to assisting teachers through a range of policies and activities that target their financial and professional welfare (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023). During their training, the government offers a significant monthly stipend of 3.63 million VND to cover living expenses. According to the Ministry of Education and Training (2023), there was a significant increase in the overall number of preschool and high school educators during the 2022-2023 academic year. The total number reached 1,234,124, which represents an increase of 71,927 compared to the previous academic year.

The Education Law of 2019 is an extensive law that covers the requirements, responsibilities, rights, and privileges of teachers (Government of Vietnam, 2019). This encompasses the selection process that considers specialized training, a dedication to ongoing professional growth, and the guarantee of respect and physical welfare. Additional legal instruments, including Decree 71/2020/ND-CP, Decree 77/2021/ND-CP, Circular 01/2021/TT-BGDĐT and other relevant papers, establish comprehensive guidelines on numerous aspects connected to teachers, thereby providing a strong and comprehensive legal structure (Government of Vietnam, 2020, 2021; Ministry of Education and Training, 2021).

The Ministry of Education and Training has suggested implementing salary policies that are in line with Resolution 29-NQ/TW (Centrals Steering Committee, 2013) to attract and retain educators. The objective is to implement a thorough education reform that fulfills the requirements of industrialization, modernization, and international integration. According to the Centrals Steering Committee (2013), this plan aims to give the highest priority to teacher pay within the administrative career ladder structure. It also suggests providing additional allowances based on job nature and geographical factors.

In addition to national initiatives, communities have actively contributed to resolving tangible economic and social circumstances. The Ministry of Education and Training has formulated and endorsed supplementary policies that include several aspects, such as income, working conditions, educational environment, public housing, transportation, transfers, and other related areas (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023). These initiatives are specifically crafted to appeal to and provide confidence to teachers in their crucial role in influencing the future.

Nevertheless, Vietnam encounters significant obstacles in its education system, despite its praiseworthy endeavors. The chronic scarcity of teachers continues to be a pressing concern, with a national demand for 118,253 instructors in the
In conclusion, the pressing need to address issues related to teacher recruitment, retention, and wage policies to guarantee the cultivation of a competent and driven teaching workforce. Implementing such measures is vital for the triumph and enduringness of Vietnam’s education system, ultimately molding the destiny of the nation.

6. Recommendations

When considering education in some ASEAN countries while looking back at the background of education in Vietnam, the Vietnamese government has given the most importance to education. Teachers have been the primary focus in the policy framework, as indicated by different legal instruments, including decrees and circulars. Nevertheless, despite the recognized endeavors, the current policy framework for teachers needs additional focus on procedural elements, policy substance, and execution. The purpose of this initiative is to establish a comprehensive and sophisticated legislative structure that addresses standards, recruiting, management, compensation, and recognition for teachers. It should be by the roles, important positions, and distinct professional qualities of the teaching profession. The particular factors to be considered are as follows:

First, the Teacher Law proposal in Vietnam is crucial for establishing clear guidelines, criteria, and ethical principles for educators, which is essential for the country’s education system. This concise literature review explores current academic research, emphasizing global exemplars in relation to teacher policies and their influence on leadership, governance, and ethical norms. (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) showed the significance of well-defined responsibilities for educators, advocating for the implementation of a Teacher Law that would offer a legal structure in line with international standards. The literature highlights the importance of state leadership in influencing the trajectory of the teaching workforce (OECD, 2017a). This viewpoint is also supported by the suggested strategy, which promotes greater state leadership and decentralized management (Han, 2018). The proposed policy places great importance on ethical standards, in line with Darling-Hammond et al. (2009a)’s focus on ethical behavior, to ensure that ethical and professional standards can be enforced by law. The literature continually emphasizes the societal duty of educators and their role in developing talent, as supported by the proposed policy that specifically stresses educators’ responsibility in fostering talent and contributing to the development of human resources. Ultimately, the literature strongly advocates for the implementation of a comprehensive Teacher Law in Vietnam. This law would serve as a strategic plan to improve professionalism, effectiveness, and societal influence within the teaching profession. This viewpoint is supported by various studies Darling-Hammond et al. (2009b); Han (2018); Ingersoll and Strong (2011).

Second, to improve teacher policies in Vietnam, it is crucial to create a legal structure that promotes transparent and merit-based teacher recruitment, in line with internationally recognized standards (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Decentralized management, according to the principles of subsidiarity, provides local authorities with the authority to oversee recruitment, utilization, and development initiatives, enabling customized approaches to tackle regional requirements (OECD, 2017a). To address inequalities in teacher distribution, a methodical endeavor is needed to strategically assign teachers at the community level, prioritizing recruitment in underrepresented subject areas and regions (Han, 2018). Establishing a well-defined route for teacher preparation is essential, particularly in regard to the 2018 general education curriculum and underserved rural and minority communities. This is vital for creating a sustainable supply of qualified educators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Third, it is imperative to allocate substantial resources to comprehensive professional development initiatives to make sure that educators stay up-to-date with the latest pedagogical methodologies and subject-specific knowledge. Ongoing training sessions and seminars are significant tools that strengthen the competencies of instructors, equipping them with state-of-the-art techniques, technological skills, and effective classroom management processes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). To foster a culture of lifelong learning, it is crucial to facilitate cooperation between educational institutions and government entities. This will establish an atmosphere in which teachers consistently increase their skills, ultimately resulting in an overall improvement in the quality of instruction. Integrating technology into teaching methods is a crucial aspect of professional development, leading to a more engaging and stimulating learning experience. By offering digital resources, online training programs, and interactive teaching tools, educators can stay informed about the latest advancements in the field (Ertmer et al., 2012). Government-led initiatives that dedicate cash for infrastructure development and provide technological resources.
are crucial for facilitating the seamless integration of technology in classrooms, hence boosting the overall efficacy of the educational process.

Fourth, offering competitive compensation is essential for attracting and keeping top-notch educators. Sufficient remuneration and incentives serve as catalysts for teachers to demonstrate dedication to their profession and make valuable contributions to the education system. In addition, providing incentives based on achievement, such as bonuses for attaining specified educational goals or engaging in professional growth opportunities, can further augment teacher motivation (Han, 2018). Establishing open wage systems and equitable evaluation mechanisms is crucial for ensuring fairness and meritocracy within the teaching profession.

Fifth, the establishment of a strong and fair teacher assessment system is a vital element in maintaining elevated educational benchmarks. Regular assessments are utilized to identify specific areas that require development while also providing teachers with valuable feedback. A comprehensive assessment of a teacher's efficacy can be achieved by integrating various evaluation methods, including classroom observations, student achievement data, and peer reviews (OECD, 2017a). An evaluation procedure that is clear and supportive not only helps to discover areas of improvement but also promotes the professional growth of teachers, ultimately leading to an enhanced overall quality of education.

7. Final Considerations

Teachers play a crucial role in achieving educational achievement. This thorough research has examined the complex framework of teacher policies, closely analyzing the practices in Southeast Asian countries—Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore—with a particular focus on the distinct difficulties and potential in Vietnam.

The importance of teacher policies in influencing the educational environment has been clarified by examining worldwide examples and empirical research. A thorough examination of regulations regulating the processes of hiring, instruction, remuneration, and growth has revealed an intricate understanding of the workings of educational institutions. The report acknowledges the outstanding efforts made in Thailand, the transformative journey undertaken in Indonesia after the implementation of the Teacher Law, and the strategic measures adopted in Singapore. However, it also recognizes the necessity of a customized strategy in Vietnam.

The Vietnamese government's commitment to the well-being of teachers is clearly demonstrated by legal measures such as the Education Law of 2019 and supportive policies. Nevertheless, the issues of a shortage of teachers, unequal allocation, and financial limitations continue to exist. The urgent recommendation for the implementation of a comprehensive Teacher Law in Vietnam, in line with international standards, is of paramount importance. Enacting such a law would not only provide a legal structure but also establish explicit directives, moral standards, and cultural anticipations for educators.

The study promotes a comprehensive approach that highlights the importance of decentralized management, merit-based recruitment, and strategic teacher allocation. The comprehensive suggestion includes significant investments in continuous professional development, guaranteeing that educators remain up-to-date with growing teaching methods and technology progress. Attracting and keeping high-quality instructors is greatly influenced by offering competitive pay, incentives tied to performance, and a clear mechanism for evaluating teachers.

In Vietnam, the suggested policies aim to pave the way for a progressive future, as the country faces important decisions in its educational development. The integration of internationally recognized best practices and customized local initiatives aims to strengthen teacher policies, thereby stimulating a favorable shift in the education system. The development of high-quality education in Vietnam will be influenced by well-planned laws, strong support for teachers, and a shared dedication to preparing the younger generation for future obstacles.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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