Title of Project:
A Case Study of the Support Needs of English as a Foreign
Language (EFL) Teachers at Foreign Language Centers in Vietnam

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Final Report

Motivation for the Research
In educational research, it is widely acknowledged that teachers require substantial support throughout their teaching careers. This is true for science teachers in South Korea or English language teachers in Vietnam. Investigating teacher support needs of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNETs) and of native English-speaking teachers (NETs) is timely amidst English language education reforms in Vietnam and similar ELT/ EFL (English Language Teaching/ English as a Foreign Language) contexts. Recent English language policy changes have witnessed increasing demands for the quantity and quality of NNETs and NETs. NNETs teaching in the state English language education sector have gained global attention in research, policy and practice regarding their teaching professionalism. However, there is a paucity of mainstream research in Vietnam and EFL countries investigating the support needs of NNETs and NETs at Foreign Language Centers (FLCs), a setting of the non-state English language education sector in Vietnam. In addition, research has overlooked how support needs are addressed in educational leadership practices.

Teacher support needs are likely to be multi-faceted. The scope of the term *teacher support* employed in this study is broader than and partially different from that of the concept generally adopted in current research (e.g., Humphries & Burns, 2015; Li, 2014; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Vu & Pham, 2014). The term *teacher support needs* refers to any form of support NNETs and NETs perceive they need (i.e., expressed support needs) in their professional and personal lives that can facilitate their teaching effectiveness. These forms of support needs are based on the challenges that NNETs and NETs encountered, and require prompt action from educational leaders.

It is noticeable that the range of teacher support needs of NNETs and NETs at FLCs is highly under-researched. This is particularly the case of NNETs. It is because of this lack of research on teachers at FLCs that the present study focused on this sector and aimed to address these gaps in ELT research.

Research Questions
The primary aim of the study was to investigate, compare, and contrast the support needs of NNETs and NETs in public and private FLCs. A subordinate aim of the investigation was to identify a multifaceted teacher support needs framework for ELT settings, and to inform better leadership practices for ELT settings in a time of educational change.

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Research questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. What are the teacher support needs of teachers in foreign language center settings?
    a. What are the teacher support needs of NNETs in foreign language center settings?
    b. What are the teacher support needs of NETs in foreign language center settings?

2. What are the similarities in the teacher support needs of NNETs and NETs across public and private foreign language center settings?

3. What are the differences in the teacher support needs of NNETs and NETs across public and private foreign language center settings?

4. What are the implications of the teacher support needs of NNETs and NETs for FLC educational leaders?

Research Methodology
The present qualitative study operated within the constructivism paradigm and employed an interpretivism theoretical perspective, as well as case study methodology, to address the research questions. There were three cohorts of participants: (a) educational leaders, (b) NNETs, and (c) NETs. Selected educational leaders were those who had experiences in managing NNETs and NETs. These participants were recruited for the purpose of data triangulation. NNETs and NETs participants had to satisfy three criteria for selection: (a) being full-time, part-time, casual, or volunteer teachers, (b) having EFL, ESL, TESOL, ELT or CELTA-accredited qualifications, and (c) having at least one month of English language teaching experience at FLCs in Vietnam.

Forty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with NETs (n = 12), NNETs (n= 20) and educational leaders (n = 11) across two public and two private FLCs. In addition, institutional policy documents related to recruiting, managing, and supporting NNETs and NETs at the participating FLCs were requested.

Data collection and data analysis were conducted concurrently in order to identify whether there were any contradictory sources of information that might result in the need for additional data collection (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Data were analyzed immediately after each interview to generate further probing questions for the next interview and to facilitate data saturation.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to identify, analyze, report, and triangulate the patterns of support needs of NNETs and of NETs within and across public and private FLCs from both teachers' and educational leaders' perspectives. The findings of the study could only be drawn from interview data because policy documents could not be collected as planned. There were limited, inaccessible, or no official documents pertaining to managing and supporting NNETs and NETs.

Summary of Findings
Data revealed that there were similarities and differences in the perceptions of teacher support needs between the cohort of NNETs and the cohort of NETs. The same cohort of teachers (i.e., NNETs or NETs) teaching at public FLCs and at private FLCs also had similar and unique forms of support needs, depending on individual teachers' backgrounds, the forms of capital that teachers possessed, institutional structures, and the degree of supportive leadership. A significant finding of the study is the gaps and mismatches in the perceptions of teacher support needs between educational leaders and

teachers. For instance, to NETs, professional learning and development support needs were crucial to enhance their teaching quality. However, educational leaders appeared to have neglected inviting NETs in institutional professional development programs. In addition, what NNETs and NETs across both public and private FLCs needed was formal, systematic, and transparent institutional policies supporting these teachers; whereas, the support provided was mainly situational.

The findings of the study were employed to generate a Model of Perceptions of Teacher Support Needs, and a multifaceted Teacher Support Needs Framework facilitating NNETs, NETs and educational leaders. This study puts forward an argument that in an age of English language education reform, models of and support for teachers' continuing professional development should be incorporated with other support factors, such as administrative, emotional, and personal ones. Educational leaders at FLCs should take a holistic approach to supporting teachers within and across the four broad areas that the teachers required, including Administrative Support Needs, Professional Learning and Development Support Needs, Emotional Support Needs and Personal Support Needs. Without the full range of educational leadership inclusive of Emotional Support Needs, qualified NNETs and NETs at FLCs may commit teacher attrition or teacher turnover. This is detrimental to student outcomes, education business, and the degree to which the setting of FLC contributes to the nationwide English language education reform trajectory.

In the context of Asian EFL countries, this might be the first formal cross-sectoral study comparing and contrasting the teacher support needs of NNETs and NETs across public and private FLCs from both educational leaders' and teachers' perspectives. The findings of the study revealed new perspectives for future research in the field of English language teaching.

Implications

The study puts forward practical implications for theory and educational leadership practices. Theoretically, the findings of the study partially reflect the perceived organizational support theory employed in organizational psychology (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). The study calls for a need to integrate Alderfer's (1969, 1972) ERG (Existence- Relatedness-Growth) needs theory and Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa's (1986) perceived organizational support theory in considering ELT/EFL teachers' perceived support needs. There has not yet been a specific theory defining the perceived support needs or support needs analysis of ELT/ EFL teachers to meet their holistic and diverse support needs in their work and personal lives.

In addition, the study underscores the need to distinguish between 'teacher needs' and 'teacher support needs.' For quality and cost-effective teacher support mechanisms, it is crucial to go beyond the distinction between teachers' *wants* and *needs* by addressing the distinction between teacher needs and teacher support needs.

The study has potential benefits for NNETs and NETs in their work transitions, as well as educational leaders and policy makers in Vietnam and similar EFL contexts. NNETs and NETs should take the initiative to ask for support rather than waiting for provided support. Simultaneously, it is important for educational leaders to identify and bridge the gaps in the perceptions of NNETs' and NETs' support needs between those of educational leaders and those of the teachers. Investigating possible differences, but also similarities in NNETs' and NETs' administrative, professional, emotional, and personal support needs will illuminate teachers' actual experiences. This would allow educational leaders at public and private FLCs to make more informed decisions about the forms of support that should be systematically structured in teacher support policies. Responded to and satisfied support needs of NNETs and NETs have an impact on language learner outcomes and teacher development, as well as the FLCs' sustainable development in retaining qualified NNETs and NETs in their teaching force.

In an age of English language education reform, institutions wishing to develop support mechanisms for language teachers would be better informed from the findings of the study.

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