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SOLUTIONS TO DEVELOPING THE SCHOOL COUNSELING STAFF IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses some solutions to developing the school counseling staff in Vietnam. Four solutions for developing the workforce in this task have been proposed: 1) increasing the enrollment in educational psychology sciences; 2) communicating systematically about the needs for educational psychological counseling at schools; 3) establishing national policies to encourage the participation of private sectors in the development of the model of school counseling office; 4) proposing job code and proper salary to attract more people to the work of school counseling.

Keywords: solution, develop, staff, school counseling, solutions to developing the school counseling staff.

TÓM TẮT

Một số giải pháp phát triển số lượng đội ngũ làm công tác tham vấn học đường ở Việt Nam

Bài báo đề cập một số giải pháp phát triển số lượng đội ngũ làm công tác tham vấn học đường (TVHD) ở Việt Nam. Có bốn biện pháp phát triển số lượng đội ngũ làm công tác TVHD được đề xuất: tăng cường công tác tuyển sinh các ngành khoa học về tâm lý giáo dục; truyền thông có hệ thống về nhu cầu giáo dục tham vấn tâm lý ở trường học; có chính sách khuyến khích khu vực tư nhân tham gia vào việc phát triển mô hình phòng tham vấn tâm lý ở trường học; đề xuất mã nghề, mức lương phù hợp để tạo sự thu hút đội ngũ làm công tác TVHD.

Từ khóa: giải pháp, phát triển, đội ngũ, tham vấn học đường, giải pháp phát triển đội ngũ tham vấn học đường.

1. Introduction

Vietnam is one of the top high speed development countries in South East Asia. The economic modernization has increased stress on families, communities, and schools. As a result, the children and students in Vietnam are experiencing significant challenges of psychological or learning difficulties. According to a report in 2007, 90% of students in Vietnam report experiencing learning problems; difficulty maintaining positive relationships with parents, teachers, and friends; and making career choices (Nguyen, A. H., Le, T. M. H., & Tran, P. D., 2007). In addition to these learning, relationship, and vocational problems, more than 7 million Vietnamese school-age children are reported to

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exhibit mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or oppositional defiant disorders (Nguyen, M., 2009). When more than 97% of Vietnamese parents wanted their children to perform above average in schools, 64.92% of the students lived in incessant fear of having low grades and being reprimanded by parents or teachers, and 28.47% experienced poor appetite, fatigue, and tension (Hoang, G. T., 2005). Recently, another report from a joint study by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and UNICEF had confirmed that 8-29% of children and youth in Vietnam have mental health problems.

In the early stage of development, Vietnamese government paid lot of time to focus on economy more than social services, education and health, particular mental health. Until 2006, the total number of personnel working in the field of mental health in Vietnam was quite limited, with a total of 286 psychiatrists, the equivalent of each psychiatrist being responsible for approximately 300.000 people (World Health Organization, 2006). In a study conducted in Ho Chi Minh City regarding the qualifications of hired counselors had found that service providers to be mostly graduates of programs not directly related to psychology, such as law, journalism, or marketing. Furthermore, counseling staff may have received only short-term training, sometimes only 3 days, on how to meet the mental health needs of school-age children (Le, P., 2009).

Psychological counseling in schools (SC) is considered as a key solution for improving the quality of life and learning of students. However, the quantity and quality of SC in Vietnam still remain unknown. For that reason, this paper had been conducted to indicate some solutions to develop SC in Vietnam.

2. Results and discussion

2.1. Some foundations to propose the solutions for developing the school counseling staff

2.1.1. Legal foundations

The improvement of the school counseling staff needs to concrete on the legal foundations in order to ensure that the proposing solutions to be in line with the Party and government policies, guidelines as well as the requirements of current educational innovation (Huynh Mai Trang, 2007).

Firstly, the perspectives view of the Party and government towards the improvement of national teacher and educational manager staff:

- The 40/CT/TW designation dated June 15th, 2004 on improving the quality of teacher and manager stated: “Teacher and educational manager is the main force playing important role”, “have to build up the teacher and educational manager in a comprehensive way”. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of education and training, the first and most important thing is the must of significantly improve the education staff including the school counseling too.

- The 29-NQ/TW resolution dated November 4th, 2013 on “Fundamental and comprehensive innovate the education and training to meet the requirements of modernization and industrialization in the context of socialist-oriented market economy and international integration”, the situation of managers and teachers has been assessed. The fact from which has been drawn that there is an inadequacy in terms of quantity, quality and structure of the staff. Some do not keep up with the demand for education reform and development, lack enthusiasm and even violate professional ethics. As a result, the Central Executive Committee of the Party clearly state the point of “developing education and training is to raise human knowledge, train human resources and foster talents” (Huynh Van Son, 2013).

Secondly, the perspectives and directions of the Party and the government in developing education and training

- Education Law on June 14th, 2005 and the Law amending and supplementing some articles of Education Law on November 25th, 2009;

- The 242-TB/TW announcement of the Central Executive Committee on April 15th, 2009 about the implementation of the resolution of the 8th Central meeting 2 and direction of education and training development until 2020;

- The 711/QĐ-TTg decision dated June 13th, 2012 by the Prime Minister on the improvement of the 2011-2020 strategy to develop national education. This decision clearly stated many specific objectives of education development for example: “Until 2020, the national education will have been reformed basically and comprehensively in the direction of standardization, modernization, socialization, democratization and international integration; education quality will have been comprehensively enhanced including the strengthening of ethical education, life skills, creativity, practical capacity, foreign language proficiency and computer skills; will have met the requirements of human resources nurture and development, specifically highly qualified staff in order to serve the career of modernization, industrialization of the country and build knowledge economy”.

Thirdly, the regulations and circulars on school counseling.

The 31/2017/TT-BGDĐT circular by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) dated December 18th, 2017 on the implementation of school counseling in general education system.

The general orientations on school counseling and general education reform in general and the management and improvement of the quality of educational staff in particular poses an urgent need to strengthen lot of solutions for managing the current school counseling staff.

According to the above legal foundations, it can be figured out that school counseling has been paid attention to and conducted. Although it has not been emphasized, its roles and position have been recognized. The recognition of school counseling is

claimed in regulations, circulars and resolutions. It has been more and more specified. It is school counseling that contribute in making the objectives of education in the period of 2011-2020 achievable.

2.1.2. Theoretical foundations

- Developing school counseling staff has been considered as the leading factor deciding the quality of school counseling model (Phuong Le, Kristi Hagans, Kristin Powers, & Michael Hass, 2011).

Psychological school counseling has been regarded as the basic and important activity in education, physical and mental care for students. It helps in effectively dealing with students' problems and preventing the negative effects that influence students' study and life quality.

To carry out this duty, school counselors are the main force in providing reasonable pieces of advice and counseling on psychology at schools. They exert certain effects on school education quality. Therefore, developing school counselors is the objective and motivation. The staff for school counseling should satisfy the requirements in terms of quantity, quality and structure. They should acquire good professional knowledge on age psychology and counseling skills in the aspects of professional ethics, attitudes, political qualities and ethical lifestyles.

- Improving school counselors for psychology is the key to school education.

It can be said that developing the school counseling staff is the key to the strategy of "fundamental and comprehensive education reform". Although there have been hardships, it is a need to confirm the belief that education reform and strategies in developing school counseling brings about expected results with the Party's leadership, the consensus of all levels, branches and the whole society, which helps boost innovation process and international integration of the country.

Strengthening Uncle Ho Chi Minh's thoughts and basing on the current situation of the national education and training, the Resolution of the 11th National Party Congress clearly states: "Development in education is the national top priority policy. It is a need for fundamental and comprehensive Vietnamese education towards standardization, modernization, socialization, democratization and international integration, in which the innovation in education mechanisms and building the capacity of managers and teachers is the core factor". This can be noted as the strategical thought which identifies the comprehensive, objective and scientific perspectives of the Party towards the teaching staff and specifically the school counselors (Huynh Van Son, 2013).

To sum up, developing the school counseling staff is like building the foundation for a house. If they want to build a solid and durable house over time, the foundation needs to be strongly constructed. Correspondingly, school counseling fulfills its duty and meaning only when school counselors are trained professionally.

2.1.3. Practical foundations

For the past years, the school counseling staff has been increasingly trained to meet the requirements of school counseling. However, when it comes to the demands for innovation in education in modernization and industrialization age, school counselors show specific limits. There is a lack in school counselors, specifically in remote area. Their professional knowledge seem not meet the requirements of education reform and social-economical development. Most of them have not been trained professionally. The managers' ability is not on par with education development demands. Beside that some policies and mechanisms are not reasonable (Kassay, K. S., 2011). Therefore, the motivation is not created to enhance the potential of these school counselors. It is high time that this staff's capacity be built comprehensively. This is a task that both meets immediate requirements and is a long-term strategy for successful implementation of the school counseling model.

The survey on 102 managers and 218 school counselors in the South of Vietnam indicated that the schools had rooms for psychological counseling but these rooms had not been professionally built. School counselors in these schools was bachelor and had working experience less than 10 years. Two-thirds of them are concurrently holding different positions at schools. Consequently, there were some limitations in fulfilling counseling tasks. Their knowledge in psychological counseling skills was at average to fair level. According to their managers, their knowledge on physiological and psychological age was under the normal. When it came to counseling skills, their implementation of basic skills was better than that of specialized skills. They had positive attitude towards school counseling. Their characteristics was rated fair depending on their scores identification. The research results also demonstrated the fact that there was an inequality of psychological counseling in the school along with the level education analysis (Nguyen Thi Minh Hong et al., 2017).

Nguyen Thi Minh Hong and her colleagues also indicated that the school manager only conducted the annual plan with less and unbalanced details for managing of school counselors. The implementation of assessment activities for managing of school counselors was rated at the lowest score up on the survey scale. The policy implementation for this staff has also not been paid attention to by the managers. The general results on developing school counselors in terms of skills show that their skills are rated average with the mean=2,75. The most notable is the functions of assessment and evaluation are rated "weak" with the mean=2.16.

There have been numerous factors influenced the development of school counselors in southern Vietnam. Generally, the subjective features have more effects than the objective ones.

2.2. *Some solutions to improve school counselors*

Four solutions for the improvement of school counseling staff are put forward as follows:

2.2.1. *First solution: increasing the recruitment of educational psychology profession*

a. Significance

In order to prepare for school counselors, it is a prerequisite to increase the recruitment of the educational psychology profession from higher education institutions. However, it appears a challenge since there is a limited number of students who enrolled in this major. The reasons seem to be that the model of school counseling is rather new and students' awareness of this major is not high enough. Those graduates can not meet the requirements of school counseling career. It is the fact that there is a lack of quantity and also quality of the school counselors. Therefore, enhancing the recruitment is considered to be vital mission.

Recruitment which is regarded as the first step in the training process plays a significant and decisive role in preparing for qualified school counselors in short-term or long-term periods. Thus, increasing the recruitment, rising up the value of school counseling to attract inputs is essential. When the inputs are both quantitative and qualitative, more or less the outputs will be ensured. If the recruitment is successfully done, then the problem of human resources will be solved to meet the demand of psychological counseling in the Southern general schools.

b. Content

Recruitment work is the choosing of learners for a specific discipline or major based on related regulations recognized by authorities. Then, the recruitment of educational psychology is the choosing of learners for the educational psychology training. Upon graduation, students can work as school counselors, class formers or conduct vocational training at general education schools or specialized education institutions. They can evaluate children psychology and intervene disorders in the development of children at school psychological clinics. They can also teach difference topics or themes in psychology at schools, colleges or universities.

In order to ensure the efficiency in recruitment of disciplines in educational psychology, it is a need for the following activities to be carried out:

- The tertiary education institutions which train educational psychology need to promote propaganda, enrollment counseling in various ways;
- The propaganda and counseling contents provide further information about local and international school counselors and labor force analysis;
- Educational administrators have the tendency to streamline students to increase the number of learners;

- To build a contingent of full-time recruiters: this means that this staff is in charge of recruiting learners and build propaganda, counseling and recruiting plans for all disciplines of the university;

- Identifying appropriate inputs for educational psychology (A, B, C or D).

- Carrying out various ways of recruiting learners:

- + Based on high school entrance examination results: The entrance examination score is the total score of 3 integrated subjects taken in the national high school examination without coefficient multiplication and plus the priority points of the subjects and areas.

- + The priority placed on students from specialized schools, national gifted schools and from groups of 30 high schools with national examination high score.

- + Based on average score of integrated subjects in national examination (grades 10, 11 and 12).

- + Recruiting students who win prizes in national examinations for excellent students according to the MOET's regulations.

c. Conditions of implementation

- Propaganda and counseling in the recruitment of students need to be conducted regularly and continuously for all subjects, specifically for those who collaborate with homeroom teachers, parental association in general education schools.

- The recruitment staff has to ensure the quantity and quality since this is the important factor deciding the efficiency of recruitment.

- Propaganda and counseling to attract learners must be based on significant data and not idealized or exaggerated.

2.2.2. *Second solution:* organizing an effectively systematic communication work on the needs of school counseling

a. Significance

The survey results indicated the fact that psychological counseling needs in the southern general schools was high (based on the results of surveying 520 high school students at specific provinces in southern area). However, school psychology had not been paid close attention which created an unmanageable and spontaneous formation.

Parents still have to worry much about making both ends meet. That's why they have little time paying close attention to the mental health of their children. Students get limited knowledge of school counseling support in their school. The school counselors have not recognized their role and importance. Beside that, the development of school counseling model is dealing with two considerable challenges of human resources and finance. Finally, the propaganda of its implementation has not been strong and specific enough.

Therefore, it has to organize an effectively systematic communication work on the needs of school counseling in order to: improve the belief of school counselors with labor

market when they start their job and increase the number of school counselors. This also brings about the ease for those who are interested in this counseling work and promotes the quantity of school counselors in need.

This solution helps to promote the recognition about the importance of school counseling to both organizations and individuals as well as the needs of psychological counseling in general schools system. As the result, to reach the consensus and support of the entire people in awareness, attitude, and actions for the development of school counseling staff to meet the needs of psychological counseling.

b. Content

The needs of psychological counseling in school is considered as students' necessary requirements for support in psychology when they face psychological difficulties in awareness, attitudes and behavior to make up their minds. Students want to share school counselors for their support in order to search for solutions to their psychological problems (Kelly Barker et al., 2008).

Systematic propaganda about psychological school counseling is a way to continuously exchange information, ideas and emotions systematically about those who are dealing with psychological problems and are in need for help. They would be supported to raise their awareness, maintain balance and enhance their ability in coping with these problems in life and make appropriate and effective decisions. This is also to promote the role of school counseling. In order to obtain good systematic communication about school counseling, it is a need for the following to be carried out:

- Raising the awareness of the Party committees, authorities, communities and families about the role of school counseling in national educational system and in human resource development by mastering policies and analyzing needs for school counseling.
- Enhancing the responsibility of the Party committees and managerial agencies at all levels and local administrations in directing and organizing the implementation of information and communication on psychological counseling needs.
- Identifying needs is one of the important and necessary issued to ensure practical and effective support. The surveys can be conducted in order to recognize students' needs and then plans are implemented.
- Building information and communication plans, designing and providing school counseling needs for political and social organizations, vocational organizations, parents and the communities.
- Propaganda through public communication means about the position, role and meaning of school counseling. Integrating communication about school counseling into the activities at related conferences or workshops so that researchers, managers, teachers, political and social organizations and entrepreneurs can recognize its importance to improve school counseling staff.

c. Conditions of implementation

- Dissemination of the system of psychological counseling needs in schools should be accompanied by practical data as evidence of its necessity.
- It is a need to build appropriate, scientific communication models to ensure two-way communication
- The propagation of psychological counseling needs must be scientific and appropriate, which reflects usage of communication means, environment and subjects.
- The whole system of information assurance in school management must be developed according to the centralized and unified requirements on objectives, plans and methods.
- The propagation must be practical. It should be in multi-forms, multi-media and be carried out regularly.
- The propagation of psychological counseling needs must focus on school counselors to meet the requirements of school counseling at general education schools.

*2.2.3. Third solution: establishing the national policies in order to encourage the participant of private sectors in the development of school counseling**a. Significance*

In recent years, the educational socialization strategy of getting psychological counseling into school environment has achieved specific results. One of the striking features is the increasing quantity in the model of school counseling offices. However, this model is only paid attention to at public schools.

Students are getting psychological problems owing to increasing pressure from their study, family expectations and other relationships. If students at private schools are not taken good care of their mental health, they will suffer from psychological challenges at high rate.

In order for the model to be developed, private schools should have policies encouraging private sectors to take part in the development of psychological counseling at schools. These policies would help develop the system of school counseling and diversifying the models with the participation of the government and private sectors. This will inevitably lead into the higher number of school counselors and meet the requirements of school counseling nowadays.

b. Content

In order to achieve the aim of developing school counselors at private schools, authorities at all levels should carry out the following activities:

- Continuing supplementing and perfecting regimes and policies, promoting socialization in school counseling in both public and private schools;

- Adopting the Decree No. 69/2008/QĐ-TTg dated May 30, 2008 of the Prime Minister on policies to encourage the socialization of activities in the fields of education, vocational training, health, sports and environment;

- Encouraging, attracting and creating favorable condition for social organizations, vocational, economical organizations, local and foreign individuals to invest into school counseling models at schools and training school counselors.

c. Conditions of implementation

- It is a need to issue policies to support and facilitate the private sectors to participate into the development of school counseling to diversify school counseling models at schools and training school counselors.

- Educational socialization, specifically needs for investment into school counseling should be enhanced for managers at all levels in schools and private sectors.

- It is necessary to make private sectors clearly benefit from the participation of school counseling development.

2.2.4. Fourth solution: establishing the national job code for school counseling profession with an attractive salary and working conditions

a. Significance

Psychological school counseling is considered as one of the standards to evaluate school quality and national education system. Several countries across the globe with developed school counseling have clear-cut regulations on career codes for school counselors. In Vietnam, until now, school counselors do not get professional code and official title so it is difficult for them to be assigned with specific work. Therefore, proposing career codes and appropriate salary rate to attract school counselors is quite necessary. This also creates legal foundation to recruit human resources to work as school counselors and helps develop school counseling in southern area.

b. Content

For the Party and government, building occupational codes and salary rate has not been a new thing to do. However, this creates new requirements for national education. In order to ensure systematic and scientific professional codes and salary for school counselors, it is a need for the following to be conducted:

- The Party and the government need to pay close attention to the promulgation of regulations and documents on occupational codes and salary policies for school counselors

- The MOET should have projects on occupational codes and related issues to school counselors and soonly identify professional codes for current school counselors.

- There should be the support from related organizations and agencies in directing and building professional codes for school counselors.

- The regulations on school counseling should be detailed for students.

- There should be studies on building labor quota to be appropriate for career characteristics.

c. Conditions of implementation

- There should be care and attention in building professional codes and salary rate as the legal basis

- There should be a scientific and systematic building of labor quota to identify appropriate ones.

- There should be a tight mechanism in management, communication and propagation of professional codes and salary rate.

3. Conclusion

The development of school counseling is the key in the strategy of “fundamental and comprehensive educational reform”. There have been four solutions proposed to develop school counselors: 1) increasing the recruitment of educational psychology profession; 2) organizing an effectively systematic communication work on the needs of school counseling; 3) establishing the national policies in order to encourage the participant of private sectors in the development of school counseling; and 4) establishing the national job code for school counseling profession with an attractive salary and working conditions. Each solution has its own significance and favorable implementation conditions.

These solutions of developing school counselors have mutual relationship and interaction to promote each other. This measure is the condition and foundations for the other to be conducted. Therefore, it is a need for these solutions to be implemented synchronously to maximize their advantages. The work of school counseling only promotes its significance and function in case of the support from psychological profession training. It is no doubt that the core backing from the part, government, and other related agencies also decide the success of the development of school counselors.

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