

## BOOK REVIEW

**Professional development of English language teachers in Asia: Lessons from Japan and Vietnam**, edited by Kayoko Hashimoto and Van-Trao Nguyen, London, Routledge, 2018, 172 pp., A\$187.85 (hardback), A\$47.45 (eBook), ISBN 9781315413259.

This book is a collection of empirical studies on several contemporary issues pertinent to the professional development (PD) of English language teachers in Japan and Vietnam with reference to the two countries' recent educational reform policies. In this volume, PD is conceptualised as synonymous with language teacher education, which covers different aspects of teacher learning and development both within and beyond teacher education programs, such as teachers' beliefs, knowledge, teaching practice, and involvement in research. What presumably sets the book apart from other volumes of similar topics is its focus on the two Asian contexts that bear little resemblance socio-historically, but, as is unpacked in the book, share many commonalities with regard to English teaching and learning. Particularly, the editors point out that similarities between Japan and Vietnam in terms of the peoples' desires for English proficiency, and the governments' efforts to enhance the quality of English education and English teacher development, are their rationale for bringing together scholarly works on English teachers' PD from these two contexts.

The first chapter by Kayoko Hashimoto provides a general background to the status and development of English and English education in the two focused contexts, especially highlighting efforts by both the Japanese and Vietnamese governments to implement strategic plans to enhance the quality of education, with English language teaching (ELT) being one of the key areas of changes. This chapter also usefully points out the distinctiveness of the book by identifying two important gaps in the literature on language teachers' PD that it aims to fulfill: (i) an exploration of English teachers' PD in close relation to the enactment of top-down language policies, and (ii) the lack of empirical research on teacher education and development in Asian contexts. In the second chapter, Van-Trao Nguyen and Khoi Mai Ngoc outlines efforts to enhance English competency and English teachers' PD opportunities in countries within the ASEAN economic community (AEC), in which Vietnam is a member. The authors argue for the need to establish a common framework of competencies for English teachers and collaborative PD programs across AEC member countries, which will subsequently help connect and improve the educational standards of the region.

After the first two background chapters, the book is divided into two main parts, with each containing four chapters exploring different issues pertaining to the PD of English teachers in Japan and Vietnam respectively. The first chapter of Part 1 (Chapter 3) by Kayoko Hashimoto reveals inadequacies in the implementation of ELT reform policies at the primary level in Japan, where homeroom teachers with no relevant qualifications are responsible for teaching English classes and have to take an 'English language teaching' course as part of their teaching license renewal process. In Chapter 4, Gregory Paul Glasgow reports on an empirical study investigating challenges faced by Japanese high school English teachers when executing the teaching 'English in English' initiative. The chapter also suggests implications regarding the role of PD in helping teachers to respond better to this policy requirement. Chapter 5, by Gregory Paul Glasgow and Chris Carl Hale, describes the design and development of a

“localised and carefully tailored” (p. 72) PD program for Japanese teachers of English (JTEs), which focuses on utilising local materials and knowledge, promoting a context-appropriate approach to communicative language teaching (CLT), and encouraging teacher reflection. In Chapter 6, Kiyoshi Naka shifts the focus to pre-service JTEs and examines the effectiveness of an English teacher education course at the undergraduate level that aims to foster teacher learners’ broadened and critical views towards the learning and teaching of English as a global language. The course covers critical topics such as Standard English and English varieties, rethinking the notion of an idealised ‘native speaker’ as the target for learning, and critiques of CLT.

Part 2 of the book is dedicated to contemporary PD of Vietnamese teachers of English, with all four chapters centred around PD activities enacted within the National Foreign Language Project 2020 (Project 2020), a massive reform effort by the Vietnamese government to enhance the quality of foreign language learning and teaching in the country (MOET, 2008). Chapter 7 by Van-Trao Nguyen provides an overview of Project 2020 and outlines key policies specifically related to Vietnamese English teachers’ PD. These policies target three main areas: (i) enhancing teachers’ English language proficiency and classroom teaching, (ii) incorporating technology as a means to maintain PD for English teachers, and (iii) promoting action research (AR) as an important component of long-term PD. The final three chapters of the book subsequently reveal the realities of implementing these policies. Chapter 8 by Le Van Canh reports on the results of an AR-focused PD program aimed to develop secondary school English teachers’ basic AR skills, and uncovers positive outcomes as well as challenges faced by the teachers in carrying out AR projects as part of the training. Interestingly, the author suggests that considering the characteristics of the Vietnamese research culture, it might be worthwhile to make AR a compulsory component of English teachers’ PD before it becomes voluntary. In Chapter 9, Nhat Thi Hong Nguyen studies teachers’ views following their participation in a large-scale PD course on computer-assisted language learning (CALL). The study shows that the course appeared effective in equipping the teachers with useful technical skills to plan and carry out CALL lessons. More importantly, it suggests that successful delivery of CALL-related PD courses requires an integration of both technology and pedagogy training. The final chapter by Khoi Mai Ngoc examines hindrances to the proficiency development of Vietnamese teachers of English, highlighting the lack of an English-speaking environment and institutional support and encouragement as among the contributing factors. The chapter then argues for the need to systematically establish language learning communities (LLCs) for English teachers to practice and maintain their language skills.

The book as a whole provides a vivacious picture of the landscape of PD for English teachers in Japan and Vietnam. Its chapters cover PD activities conducted at a wide range of teaching levels (i.e., primary, secondary, and high school) and contexts (i.e., pre-service and in-service teacher education), demonstrating the two countries’ continuous efforts to enhance their quality of English teaching and learning. The individual studies are carefully designed and reported in rich detail by researchers-teacher educators who were either directly involved in the investigated PD initiatives as trainers, or had a good understanding of the PD situation in their research contexts. This insider’s knowledge and experience could be observed across almost all chapters of the book, adding to its authenticity and usefulness. As such, several chapters of the book contain useful suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the PD activities under

investigation. Additionally, I find that many of the described PD courses and programs offer valuable points of reference for teacher educators working at high school and university levels who are also interested in following similar PD approaches or activities. For example, educators keen to foster a critical understanding of language and culture in the current globalised age among their English teacher learners could learn from Kiyoshi Naka's design and implementation of a PD course on teaching methodology. Likewise, those planning to incorporate AR as part of their teacher education courses could follow and/or adapt Le Van Canh's procedures for introducing AR to teachers/teacher learners who have little prior research experience.

Another unique aspect of the book that helps to tie all its chapters together, as has also been acknowledged by the editors, is its examination of English teachers' PD with close reference to the two countries' national language reform policies. Most, if not all, PD activities reported in the book are initiated by the two countries' central governments or education administrative bodies. Additionally, the two chapters by Kayoko Hashimoto and Van-Trao Nguyen that analyse PD-related policy documents offer useful and critical views towards the two governments' ambitions about English education. This policy-informed characteristic sets the book apart from other PD-focused publications which may have concentrated on mainly teacher-initiated PD activities within their range of investigation.

Although abundant with positive features, the book leaves some room to be desired. While the book itself focuses on top-down government-initiated PD activities, the concept of teachers' PD could have been more comprehensively unpacked and discussed in perhaps the introductory chapter to distinguish between other- and teacher-initiated PD activities. Traditional PD programs for language teachers have often been externally driven (Borg, 2015); recent research, however, has suggested that continuing PD "is most likely to be successful if it is a shared enterprise" (Hayes, 2019, p. 156). This means teachers should not just be engaged in other-initiated PD activities, but also actively seek and create their own opportunities for PD. Such a discussion could have helped readers to understand better some of the inadequacies and resistance reported by teacher participants in subsequent chapters of the book, where most of the reported PD activities were other-initiated. Additionally, although the editors state that the book "is not a comparative study of Japan and Vietnam" (p. 2), it would have been enriched by an analytical discussion (based on what has been reported across the chapters in the book) on PD policies and implementation activities that have worked and not worked for both contexts, and the extent to which they could act as 'lessons' for other similar Asian contexts with regard to PD for English teachers. This could have been done in a separate conclusion chapter added toward the end of the book. Adding a conclusion chapter may also have given the editors more space to demonstrate better their rationale for bringing together dialogues on PD in the Japanese and Vietnamese contexts. Finally, the book may be better linked if there were more cross-references among the different chapters, as on several occasions the PD features discussed in one chapter have also been mentioned in a preceding chapter.

To conclude, *Professional development of English language teachers in Asia: Lessons from Japan and Vietnam* provides comprehensive, rich, and updated insights into the realities of PD for English teachers in the two focused contexts. Its concentration on teachers' PD in relation to national language policies makes the book relatable to other similar contexts where language education is centrally mandated by governmental bodies, thus enhancing the usefulness of the PD lessons drawn from the

chapters in the book. Additionally, several PD activities described in the empirical studies reported in the book have great practical relevance and can be adapted to suit several other PD contexts. This volume is, therefore, a useful reference material for language teacher educators, policy makers, and second language researchers with an interest in the role of PD in language education.

## References

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