Providing Professional Development Approaches for Novice Lecturers: A Case of One Chinese University

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Abstract
In the higher education field, professional development helps novice lecturers transform their identities and familiarize themselves with their work to become more comfortable teaching at the university. The task of university management in the professional development of novice lecturers is to supervise their professional growth and to design and continuously improve professional development approaches aimed at enhancing their capabilities. The purpose of this qualitative case study is from the university management perspective to explore the various approaches employed by a particular university in fostering the professional development of novice lecturers and what the benefits of these approaches bring to novice lecturers. To achieve this, in-depth interviews were conducted with six members of the university management, and documentary data was also gathered. A thematic analysis was subsequently conducted to extract key themes from the collected data. This study revealed that in this selected university, the university management assists and supports the professional development of novice lecturers through a range of approaches such as workshops and lectures, teaching competitions, mentorship programs, and participation in university-enterprise collaborations. These diversified professional development approaches enable novice lecturers to enhance their professional skills and competencies, as well as self-confidence, laying a strong base for them to grow into outstanding educators. It is recommended that the university management maintain and improve existing professional development approaches and innovate other activities and programs to support novice lecturers on an ongoing basis.
Keywords: Professional Development, Approaches, Novice lecturer, University Management

Introduction

Quality teaching in higher education is important, university lecturers serve as carriers of knowledge and wisdom while functioning as educators who foster academic advancement and steer the evolution of academics in universities (Tlali, 2018; Fabriz et al., 2020; Masoumi et al., 2019). The progress of their professional development is not merely linked to their careers, but also intimately tied to the enhancement of the overall quality of university education (Ngoc et al., 2020). With the popularization and deepening of higher education, novice lecturers are facing many challenges. They need to quickly adapt to the unique teaching and learning environment of the university and acquire advanced teaching methods, as well as explore and achieve innovative results in their academic research fields (Noori et al, 2020; Cortezano et al., 2021). At the same time, they also need to define their development direction and formulate scientific career planning at the early stage of their career. These requirements undoubtedly put forward a higher standard for the professionalism and comprehensive ability of novice lecturers.

Currently, higher education in China is at a critical stage of rapid development, and research on the professional development of university lecturers is becoming more and more important (Wang, 2020; Guo et al., 2019). To improve the quality of education and promote the development of universities, a series of policies and plans have been issued at the national level, aiming at providing more professional development opportunities and support for novice lecturers. Such as the *Opinions on Improving the Quality of Young Teaching Staff in Higher Education Institutions* and the *Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Development and Reform of the Teaching Staff in Higher Education in the New Era*. In this context, many universities have also responded positively by developing and implementing their own professional development programs to help novice lecturers better adapt to the university teaching environment and enhance their teaching and research abilities (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Consequently, exploring the approaches and strategies for the professional development of novice university lecturers helps to solve the real problems facing higher education at present, and has far-reaching significance in enhancing the overall level of higher education. Through in-depth research on this, more guidance on professional development can be provided to novice lecturers to help them grow and progress faster and contribute to the sustainable development of higher education.

Literature Review

Novice lecturers refer to individuals who embark on their teaching careers without teaching experience and prior training in education (Nicholls, 2005). Ramhurry (2013) specifies that novice lecturers are those who have commenced teaching within their first three years. Echoing this perspective, Chen (2018) notes that a novice lecturer possesses teaching experience spanning fewer than six semesters. For this study, and given the context of Chinese universities, novice lecturers are defined as those who hold permanent positions in universities and possess less than three years of teaching experience. The initial years of teaching hold an important role in determining the success of lecturers, and researchers have delved into the difficulties and challenges encountered by novice lecturers from diverse perspectives (Yariv & Shelly-Huber, 2020). Martínez et al (2013) contend that the initial years of classroom practice are crucial for the professional development of novice lecturers as they

shape their future commitment to effective teaching practices. Shi (2015) maintains that novice lecturers commonly encounter difficulties in teaching, class management, and integrating into university culture. This often stems from unrealistic expectations and beliefs regarding teaching, students, and the workplace. Furthermore, the university environment frequently fails to provide adequate support for novice lecturers and overlooks their needs.

To face these challenges, the role of professional development is important. The concept of professional development, as an occupational term, has been widely employed across various contexts, with researchers adopting different understandings to describe its meaning. Drude et al (2019) conceptualize professional development as a lifelong learning process in personal careers, in which in this process personal need to learn new things to improve themselves. On the other hand, Caena (2011) believes that professional development is training and activities aimed at enhancing personal knowledge and skills. Within the scope of this study, professional development can be viewed as the process of novice lecturers acquiring new knowledge and teaching skills through training, ultimately enhancing their capabilities. This enhancement may be achieved through various approaches designed to the individual needs and aspirations of the lecturers.

Butler et al (2004) suggest that professional development approaches include both collaborative and individual activities, both being effective in fostering professional growth. Echoing this, Ngoc et al (2020) categorize professional development training into external and university-based practices. External practices encompass degree enhancement, conferences, and workshops conducted by famous experts. University-based activities, on the other hand, include classroom observations of other lecturers, weekly professional meetings, and coaching-mentoring strategies. Sumarsono (2015) further expands on the role of mentioning workshops and induction programs in professional development. Zhu and Yang (2018) focus specifically on pre-service training for novice lecturers, emphasizing the need for universities to improve the development of relevant policies, establish reasonable training plans, and make full use of internet resources to build a system to help lecturers. Zheng (2017) argues for the diversity of professional development strategies for novice lecturers, such as enriching induction training types, enhancing information technology capabilities, and adopting process evaluation standards to assess the effectiveness of induction training. Therefore, it is necessary for university management to provide and implement professional development programs and training for novice lecturers.

From the above review, the researcher found that current research on professional development mostly focuses on the experiences of lecturers and ignores the role of management teams in professional development (Zhong & Craig, 2020; Xu, 2014; Butler et al., 2004). University management needs to take responsibility for managing professional development as they are the managers in the university (Ndlovu, 2018). Therefore, to bridge these gaps and highlight the role of university management, this study adopts a qualitative case study to explore the professional development approaches provided by university management for novice lecturers.

Research Purpose and Questions

The main purpose of this study is to explore the efforts made by the university management for the professional development of novice lecturers in this particular university. The specific purposes are as follows:

- To explore professional development approaches provided by university management for novice lecturers.
- To explore the benefits of professional development approaches for novice lecturers.

The two research questions that correspond to the purposes of the study are:

- What professional development approaches does the university management provide for novice lecturers?
- What are the benefits of professional development approaches for novice lecturers?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Henri Fayol's administrative theory, which comprises four key functions: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (Lloyd & Aho, 2020). Through the application of this theory, the entire process of managing novice lecturers' professional development from the perspective of university management could be explored (Phorabatho, 2013). In this context, university management, as a management team, not only designs plans for professional development but also orchestrates the implementation of related activities. Leading involves guiding and coordinating novice lecturers toward the objective of professional growth while controlling ensures the effectiveness of results. Notably, existing research on professional development tends to be trainee-centric, offering limited insights into how the management team manages and organizes such development. The use of administrative theory in this study offers an alternative perspective, enabling to identification and addressing of issues within the university management's efforts in managing professional development, thereby enhancing support for novice lecturers.

Methodology

A qualitative single case study design was chosen to conduct this study, mainly because qualitative research allows the researcher to explore and understand in depth the complexity and diversity of the research population (Fraenkel et al., 2023; Yin, 2018). In this study, the researcher is concerned with the professional development of novice lecturers from the university management perspective, which is a process that involves multiple factors and dimensions. Through qualitative research, it was possible to describe and analyze in greater detail the professional development activities and programs offered by the university and the benefits for novice lecturers. Furthermore, a single-case study design allows for the pooling of resources for an in-depth analysis of a bounded system and helps to gain a rich, nuanced, and comprehensive understanding of that case (Yin, 2018). In this study, a representative university was selected to provide useful lessons and insights for other universities by exploring its professional development approaches and exploring its characteristics in depth.

This selected university is GSTNU, a public university in Guangxi China, and the university designed and made some policies and programs for lecturers' development. The researcher employed purposive sampling to select a representative sample of university management personnel, specifically consisting of the vice chancellor for teaching and learning, the director

of the Academic Affairs Department, two administrators from the same department, and two deputy deans for teaching and learning. These six participants were chosen based on their willingness and current responsibilities regarding the professional development of lecturers and their working experience, including the planning and execution of professional development programs and activities. The sample size is not as much about the number of participants as it is about the adequacy of the information provided by the participants to address research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

In-depth interviews with the university management as well as document review were the data collection methods adopted for this study. The interviews with the university management allowed the researcher to find out what professional development approaches they provide for novice lecturers and their purposes in professional development activities. The collection of documentation included notices of programs and news reports, which further corroborated the statements made by the university management. Data analysis and collection were conducted concurrently, and the researcher began transcribing and organizing the data as soon as an interview was completed, following the steps of thematic analysis to code and categorize the data to develop themes that meet the purpose of the study to address research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). To further enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher adopted peer review and member checking, inviting an expert from the same field to critically review the research process and results, while also engaging the participants in checking and verifying the research data and findings, thereby significantly increasing the convincingness of the study results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Findings
A total of six participants from the university were invited to participate in this study, including a vice-chancellor, a director of the Academic Affairs Department, two deputy deans, and two administrators of the Academic Affairs Department. To fully protect the privacy interests of the participants, the researcher purposely used a combination of numerical and alphabetic forms in place of their real names during the data recording and analysis process. The detailed background information of these six participants has been presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Basic information of participants

No.	Name	Gender	Professional Title	Years' experience in current position
1	UMT1	Male	Associate Professor	8
2	UMT2	Female	Associate professor	8
3	UMT3	Female	Professor	7
4	UMT4	Male	Professor	6
5	UMT5	Female	Lecturer	7
6	UMT6	Female	Lecturer	7

The purpose of this study is to explore the professional development approaches provided by university management for novice lecturers and the benefits of professional development approaches for novice lecturers. Therefore, the format of the findings was based on the research questions.

Professional Development Approaches Provided by University Management for Novice Lecturers

According to the interviews conducted by the researcher with the management of the university as well as relevant documentation, this university offers four approaches to professional development for novice lecturers, which are workshops and lectures, teaching competitions, mentorship programs, and participation in university-enterprise collaborations.

Workshops and lectures

A workshop is usually an interactive learning experience with a special focus on practice and participation. It provides a platform for novice lecturers to engage in hands-on practice. In a workshop, lecturers explore in-depth specific issues or skills around a training topic through discussions, role-plays, and case analyses. Expert lectures are a more traditional but equally effective way of training. By inviting experts in the field to teach, novice lecturers systematically learn the theoretical knowledge and practical experience of the field. In this university, the university management regularly offers workshops and lectures on different topics for the lecturers.

> *"We organize monthly workshops designed to help novice lecturers address the practical issues they encounter in their professional growth. The topics of these workshops are closely centered on the core needs of novice lecturers in key areas such as pedagogy, classroom teaching skills, and effective teaching. In the activities, we emphasize the participation and interaction of the lecturers and encourage them to actively share their teaching experience and insights." (UMT2)*

> *"In addition to the experts we invite to give lectures at the university level, we also encourage faculties to invite experienced trainers whose specialties are more closely aligned to give lectures to novice lecturers." (UMT1)*

Workshops and lectures, the basic forms of professional development, are widely practiced and used at this university. Whether at the university level or the faculty level, managers have provided training for lecturers on diverse topics.

Teaching Competitions

The researcher found that this university has a wide variety of teaching competitions that aim to improve the teaching ability of lecturers in all aspects. The Young Lecturer Teaching Competition pays special attention to the development of lecturers, providing a platform for young lecturers to display their talents and exchange experiences. The Teacher Education Course Teaching Competition focuses on the professional and practical aspects of teacher education courses, encouraging lecturers to explore the concepts, methods, and techniques of teacher education courses. The Teaching Design Competition focuses on the innovation and practicability of teaching design, requiring lecturers to design creative and effective teaching plans according to the characteristics of the courses and the needs of students. These competitions create a positive and excellent teaching atmosphere on campus and inspire more novice lecturers to devote themselves to teaching research and practice.

> *"Teaching competitions usually require participating lecturers to prepare a well-designed lesson and demonstrate their teaching skills, classroom interactions, and ability to transfer knowledge within a time limit."* (UMT3)

> *"Our university organizes a university-level Young Lecturer Teaching Competition in June each year, and then selects the best to represent our university to participate in a higher level competition."* (UMT5)

Teaching competitions, as an important part of professional development activities for lecturers, play an important role in this university. Such competitions not only provide a platform for novice lecturers to demonstrate their teaching level and innovation ability but also an important way to push them to deepen their teaching reform and improve their teaching quality.

Mentorship Program

Mentorship has a long history at this university and is an effective approach to the professional development of novice lecturers. It realizes the transmission and sharing of teaching experience and professional knowledge through the establishment of a mentor-apprentice relationship between experienced lecturers and novice lecturers.

> *"Our mentorship program is by assessment tasks. For novice lecturers, they are expected to publish papers and participate in research projects on teaching reform. For experienced lecturers, they have to fulfill the corresponding number of mentoring."* (UMT6)

> *"Mentorship is popular in our university and many novice lecturers actively apply for it every year. Some faculties have done well in this aspect of mentorship and have their own set of standards."* (UMT4)

In the mentorship program, experienced lecturers play the role of guides and exemplars. They share their own teaching experiences and successes, in addition to teaching skills and methods to novice lecturers. Novice lecturers learn from them.

Participation in University-Enterprise Collaborations

The exercise and practice of novice lecturers in university-enterprise cooperation institutions is also a way of professional development at this university. At a university-enterprise partner institution, novice lecturers have direct contact with and participate in the actual operation of the institution, thus gaining first-hand working experience. Through in-depth exchanges with staff within the institution, they gain a clearer understanding of the dynamics and latest trends in the field. Such practical experience helps lecturers better combine theoretical knowledge with practical application, making the teaching content closer to reality, more targeted, and more practical.

> *"I support the activity of novice lecturers to exercise and practice in university-enterprise collaboration institutions. As university management, we will strengthen communication with the partner institutions to ensure that university-*

enterprise cooperation can be effective and achieve a win-win situation for both the university and the institutions." (UMT2)

"The students we educate mainly go to teach in primary and secondary schools. If our lecturers do not have working experience in primary and secondary schools, how can they better educate our students in the right way? We encourage lecturers without working experience in primary and secondary schools to actively participate in the practice." (UMT3)

From the statements of the university management, it is not difficult to notice their deep concern and strong support for the growth of novice lecturers. The university management encourages novice lecturers to leave their campuses and go to real work environments such as schools or enterprises.

Benefits of Professional Development Approaches for Novice Lecturers
From the information gathered, the researcher found that this university provided novice lecturers with a variety of professional development approaches that helped the lecturers improve their professional skills and competencies as well as increase their self-confidence. These two themes are the benefits that the researcher analyzed from the data.

Strengthened professional skills and competencies
Improving professional skills and competencies is the most significant benefit for novice lecturers. Whether participating in teaching competitions or practicing in the classroom under the guidance of their mentors, novice lecturers have the opportunity for continuous trial, reflection, and improvement. Through repeated practice, they gradually acquire effective teaching methods and strategies to better promote students' interest in learning and improve teaching effectiveness. Additionally, professional development also broadens the horizon of novice lecturers. When attending professional development workshops, academic seminars, and other activities, novice lecturers can come into contact with up-to-date educational concepts and research results and understand the latest developments in the field. This not only helps them update their teaching content but also inspires their innovation and promotes teaching reform. These can be confirmed by the statements made by the university management.

"After novice lecturers participated in these training activities, they acquired more practical skills, improved their classroom teaching ability, and gained a deeper understanding of the profession of lecturer. Their evaluations by students were generally favorable." (UMT4)

"I have observed a few classroom sessions with novice lecturers and I feel that they are now much more competent, both in terms of teaching preparation and classroom handling." (UMT5)

It can be said that participating in professional development activities is a necessary path for novice lecturers to grow. In the process, they not only learn professional knowledge but also feel the mission and responsibility of an education career. They apply what they have learned to their teaching and contribute to the quality of education.

Increased self-confidence

Another benefit for novice lecturers participating in professional development is that it enhances their self-confidence. Professional development trainings provide a platform to interact and share experiences with other lecturers. During these trainings, novice lecturers can exchange teaching experiences with other lecturers, share successful teaching practices, and draw inspiration and insights from the experiences of others. Through interactions and exchanges with their peers, novice lecturers can build up a wider educational network and enhance their self-confidence.

> *"Professional development activities provide opportunities for novice lecturers to show themselves and accept challenges. They continue to challenge themselves and surpass themselves, gradually developing confidence in themselves and believing that they are capable of teaching." (UMT3)*

> *"Some novice lecturers are confused about how to control the progress of the classroom when they first start teaching. By attending a series of professional development programs, they can face all kinds of teaching challenges with confidence and demonstrate a mature teaching style."(UMT1)*

As a result, through learning and training, novice lecturers can better understand the challenges of the teaching and learning process and learn how to cope with and resolve them. This accumulation of knowledge helps them to build confidence in their teaching abilities and cope with a variety of teaching situations.

Discussion

The university management in this study ensures the smooth running of the activities by designing and providing professional development approaches to the novice lecturers and monitoring them as the activities are carried out. This is a reflection of the four functions of administrative theory. The approaches to professional development offered by this university to novice lecturers are varied, as confirmed by many other researchers. Ngoc et al (2020) believe that professional development strategies include conferences, workshops, classroom observations of other lecturers, weekly professional meetings, and coaching mentoring. Ke et al (2019) believe that professional learning and development include classroom observations, attending lesson planning meetings, establishing teaching research groups, carrying out novice mentoring programs, and post hoc conferencing. These researchers agree that the promotion of the professional development of lecturers is a responsibility that should be fulfilled by the university management, and that whatever type of professional development training and approaches are available, they are designed and provided to help novice lecturers grow.

On the other hand, this study found that professional development brought positive effects to novice lecturers that is, improved competence and self-confidence. Same opinions to this study, Chikari et al (2015) conducted a quantitative study in Botswana and found that lecturers in universities view professional development positively and regard it as a panacea for professional growth, efficiency, and teaching effectiveness. Patrick et al (2021) believed that lecturers did recognize the importance and usefulness of professional development strategies and activities. In their study, many lecturers believed that professional

development activities helped them get new knowledge and skills, solve the difficulties that they had in classrooms, and provide them with ideas and strategies that are helpful with classroom management. This is also similar to the findings of this study. In addition, other researchers believe that the professional development of lecturers also plays an important role in improving student performance, and they believe that by engaging in professional development activities, lecturers can apply what they have learned to classroom practices, thereby improving student performance (Zhaohui & Anning, 2020).

Conclusion

It is concluded that in the university, the university management helps and supports the growth of novice lecturers by providing workshops and lectures, teaching competitions, mentorship programs, and participation in university-enterprise collaborations. These approaches, which improved the professional skills and competencies of novice lecturers while enhancing their self-confidence, jointly constitute a learning environment created by the university management for the professional growth of novice lecturers, playing an important role in improving the quality and teaching standards of the entire faculty.

Contribution

This study contributes in several aspects by exploring the efforts made by the university management for novice lecturers and the benefits of the professional development approach. Primarily, this study provides new perspectives and insights into the study of professional development by exploring in-depth the professional development approaches and results provided by the university for novice lecturers from the perspective of the university management, and by situating professional development in managerial activities through the use of administrative theory. Secondly, this study contributes methodologically by adopting qualitative case studies rather than other previous narrative studies, effectively collecting rich data and information within a bounded system and analyzing them in detail to ensure the objectivity and scientific validity of the findings. In addition, this study contributes to the practical significance. The university management, reflecting on the shortcomings of its practices, has continuously improved and reformed them to make research-based decisions and develop more strategies necessary for novice lecturers.

Recommendations

To ensure the continued growth and success of novice lecturers, it is recommended for the university management to not only maintain and further refine the existing professional development approaches, but also to explore and innovate other activities and programs. By periodically evaluating professional development approaches making necessary adjustments, and combining the strengths of both current and innovative professional development approaches, the university management can create a dynamic support system that could enable novice lecturers to thrive and excel in their teaching careers.

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