THE PEOPLE'S ASSESSMENTS ON THE COMPETENCES OF THE LOCAL CIVIL SERVANTS-A CASE STUDY IN HANOI CITY, VIETNAM

Ngo Sy Trung, Hanoi University of Home Affairs
Vu Thi Yen Nga, Hanoi University of Home Affairs
Ho Thi Mong Tuyen, Hanoi University of Home Affairs
Nguyen Thi To Loan, Hanoi University of Home Affairs

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on analyzing the competences of local civil servants at the commune level in a specific area of Vietnam which is Hanoi city under such contents as: Professional performance capacity (PPC); sense of responsibilities for work (SRW); attitudes of serving the people (ASP); foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (FPCS). The author collected information from 500 people in the surveyed area. The survey is conducted in 2020. The research results show that professional competences and attitudes of serving the people are interested most. Next is the sense of responsibilities, and finally foreign languages proficiency and computer skills. On the basis of the research results, the solutions have attached importance to the regular retraining on local civil servants' the professional skills, sense of responsibilities for work and attitude of serving the people. The author also hopes that the research results provide useful information for Hanoi city managers to make policy adjustments in a timely and appropriate manner in order to improve the quality of local civil servants meeting the people's requirements and promoting local and national socio-economic developments.

Keywords: Local Civil Servants, Competences of Local Civil Servants.

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Local Civil Servants' Competences

The term "*competence*" is commonly used in the sense of the abilities/capabilities to perform work (physical, intellectual and moral qualities). According to many Vietnamese linguists, *"competence is among characteristics of an individual that expresses their proficiency in work, ie they can efficiently perform one or certain activities"* (Encyclopedia Publishing House, 2005) or *"competence is the capacity to efficiently perform work thanks to the moral qualities and professional qualifications"* (Nguyen, 2006).

For local civil servants who directly contact and solve the requirements of the people on a regular basis. Their tasks are assigned according to the laws in countries in the world with the principles of serving the people and the state. The Vietnamese Law on cadres and civil servants issued in 2008 clearly stipulates that the duties of civil servants are to faithfully serve the people, protect national interests, and properly and fully perform and take responsibility for their assigned tasks. In order to fulfill these noble tasks, they must have a process of learning and

practicing such many skills as professional practice skills, complementary skills for the process of professional practice, attitude of serving the people, sense of responsibility in executing assigned tasks. Since then, the basic competences of civil servants have been formed, and described and analyzed by the laws and many Vietnamese researchers as follows: professional performance capacity, sense of responsibilities for work, attitudes of serving the people, and foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (Thanh, 2014; Trung, 2019). Within the scope of this paper, the author mainly analyzes the competences of local civil servants in Hanoi City according to the above-mentioned contents based on the specific criteria stipulated by the Vietnamese Law on Cadres and Civil Servants.

Professional Performance Capacity (PPC)

As for professional performance capacity, many researchers mention the capacity of the subject skilfully executing one or a series of activities on the basis of their knowledge or experiences to produce expected results (Trung, 2016; Cuong, 2016), include:

1. Fast and accuracy (PPC1): Civil servants can solve the people's requests in the shortest time while ensuring accuracy and obeying law, thereby creating the the people's satisfaction and confidence towards the local government.
2. Creativity (PPC2): Local civil servants have to abide by basic rules to ensure discipline in the implementation of public duties while simplifying the steps in resolving the people's requirements without affecting mutual benefits and the overall process of handling affairs of government agencies.
3. Independence in work (PPC3): This is a necessary condition for each individual before being recruited in order to become a local civil servant. Independence in handling of work is usually done well only for simple tasks in a specific stage or just for a pure professional job.
4. Co-ordination in work (PPC4): Public duty has many of them are complex and require interconnection in the process of handling work. Therefore, local civil servants need to have a harmonious coordination so that their complicated work is able to be quickly solved meeting the requirements and aspirations of the people.

Sense of responsibilities for work (SRW)

Sense of responsibilities for work is among basic requirements for local civil servants in the execution of assigned tasks. It is defined by the laws in countries and expressed in such many aspects as:

1. Compliance with laws (SRW1): State management activities are carried out with the principle of managing by law. Therefore, civil servants must comply with the law in the process of performing their assigned tasks.
2. Cooperative spirit (SRW2): The spirit of cooperation in the work is demonstrated by the integration, sharing, understanding and concern of local civil servants for the people when they come to public authorities to ask for work settlement. Thereby, they can capture a lot of aspirations and feedback from the people.
3. Progressive spirit (SRW3): Social issues are constantly arising and developing complicatedly associated with the people's requirements for the government agencies. Therefore, each local civil servant with his progressive attitude must constantly learn by himself so that he can solve the people's matters in the best way.
4. Responsibility for work (SRW4): Local civil servants must be mainly responsible for the results of resolving the people's requests and thereby, the people's confidence for the government is established.

Attitude of serving the people (ASP)

This content is also stipulated by the law on civil servants in many countries. Besides, many researchers (Ngo Thanh Can, 2014; Nguyen, 2014) also analyze in considerable details from many aspects:

1. Respect for the people, being dedicatedly devoted to the people (ASP1): Local civil servants must put the people's interests first, respect and devotedly serve the people, be ready to meet the their legitimate requirements as well as guide them in a wholehearted and thoughtful manner.
2. Listening to the people's comments and feedback (ASP2): Local civil servants need to listen to the comments and reflect from the people in order to grasp the actual situation as well as capture the people's thoughts, aspirations and voices for government agencies.
3. Being courteous and well-mannered in communicating with the people (ASP3): Local civil servants must have a courteous attitude in accordance with the conception and etiquette in the contemporary society as well as establish their standards and politeness in communicating with the people.
4. Fairness in resolving the people's requests (ASP4): Local civil servants must be aware of and treat the people in a fair way in order to bring their satisfaction for all of them avoiding unnecessary conflicts. Then, the people's interests and the benefits of the civil servants themselves are guaranteed.

Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (FPCS)

Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills strongly support local civil servants in the perfomance of professional tasks. However, in modern society, with the trend of administrative reform and integration, they are indispensable capacities mentioned by many researchers (Ngo Sy Trung, 2016), which include:

1. The ability to apply basic information technology (FPCS1): E-government has been widely applying in countries around the world, so the ability to apply information technology is a basic but high requirement for local civil servants.
2. The ability to apply intensive information technology (FPCS2): In the implementation of tasks, if civil servants are able to apply information technology to meet job requirements, it will be an important factor to help facilitate the work of the agency. Therefore, the ability to apply intensive information technology of local civil servants is a very important factor in modern and technology administration.
3. Ability to use foreign languages in communication (FPCS3): In the current context of integration, state agencies need to exchange and learn experiences with those from other countries and international organizations, which require each local civil servant to have foreign language proficiency as a key to integration, which is especially the ability to use foreign languages in communication.
4. Ability to use foreign languages for special purposes (FPCS4): Local civil servants not only have to use foreign languages in general but also foreign languages for special purposes meeting the requirements of scientific research and summarize domestic and foreign practical experiences in order to give advice in policy making and implement international cooperation activities.

From the research overview, the authors built a research model on the competences of local civil servants as shown in Figure 1 below:
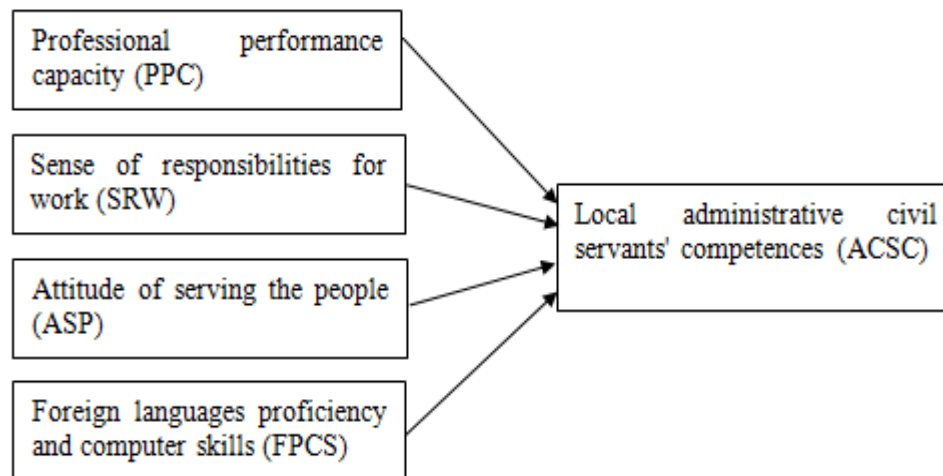
FIGURE 1
THE RESEARCH MODEL

In the above research model, the independent variables (such as Professional performance capacity, Sense of responsibilities for work, Attitude of serving the people, Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills) affect the dependent variable (such as Local civil servants' competences) at different levels based on the people's opinions, thereby the actual competences of local civil servants are revealed. This is the task that the author needs to study in order to clarify the relationship between these variables.

Hypotheses

H1   The professional performance capacity has a positive relationship with the local civil servants' competences.

H2   The sense of responsibilities for work has a nagative relationship with the local civil servants' competences.

H3   The attitude of serving the people has a positive relationship with the local civil servants' competences.

H4   The foreign languages proficiency and computer skills have a positive relationship with the local civil servants' competences.

RESEARCH METHODS

Surveyed Area

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, is a special administrative unit with 582 commune-level administrative units and over 4000 commune-level administrative civil servants. With an area of 332492 km², Hanoi is among the 17 largest capitals in the world. As of the year of 2018, Hanoi's population was 8215000 people, of which 55% (ie 4.5 million people) lived in urban areas and

3.7 million in rural areas (45%) with the educational level was high compared to the national average (General Statistics Office, 2018). This is one of the favorable factors for the author in the process of surveying the people's opinions on the competences of local civil servants.

Research Samples and Methods

To carry out this research, the authors conduct surveys and collect the people's opinions in two steps: preliminary and official investigations.

Preliminary investigation

The author uses the qualitative research method by intensively interviewing individuals and groups focusing on the experts and managers working at local government agencies in Hanoi city in order to adjust the research scales as well as improve the questionnaire to suit the characteristics of the surveyed area.

The questionnaire consisting of scales was built based on the results of the research review. The components in the model are all measured by Likert 5-level scale with the level 1 - Strongly disagree and the level 5 - Strongly agree. The bottom of the questionnaire is demographic information including the questions about gender, age, education level and number of visits to government agencies in the last 5 years. The author designed a questionnaire with identification scales. After that, the research questionnaire was completed and put into official survey in 2020 by quantitative methods in many localities in Hanoi city.

Official investigation

The overall research is the local people over 18 years of age, who have worked and exposed civil servants at local government agencies more than 5 times; they are of different ages, places of living and educational levels.

The measurement model consists of 16 observed variables and according to the minimum principle, there is a measurement variable for every 5 elements (Huu, 2018). Therefore, the minimum number of research sample elements needed is 16*5=80 and implemented in 5 urban districts in Hanoi city so the minimum sample is 80*5=400. However, in this study, the authors selected a sample size of 500 larger than the minimum sample to ensure science in selecting research samples. Questionnaires are sent directly to respondents with a non-random sampling method (preliminary interview to find out the number of visits to government agencies during the last 5 years of the surveyed people and their consents to answer the survey).

The results obtained 448/500 satisfactory votes, meeting the response rate of 89.6%. The characteristics of the research sample in Table 1 have a percentage of women accounting for 35.5%, of men accounting for 64.5%; the age of from 18 to 30 years old accounting for 44.9%, over 30 years old accounting for 55.1%; having worked with government agencies 5-10 times accounting for 73.9%, over 10 times accounting for 26.1%. The method of data processing was carried out through the following steps: (1) Testing the scales and reliability of the measurement variables by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients and validated by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA); (2) analyzying multiples linear regression to test research models and hypotheses.

Table 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLES			
Sample Size (n=448)		**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	289	64.5
	Female	159	35.5
Age	From 18 to 30	201	44.9
	From 21 to 40	173	38.6
	Over 40	74	16.5
Number of working times with local authorities in the period of 2014-2019	5-10 times	331	73.9
	Over 10 times	117	26.1
Educational levels	Secondary education	79	17.6
	Junior college/professional secondary education	105	23.5
	Higher education	201	44.9
	Postgraduate	63	14.0

RESEARCH RESULTS

Testing the Scales

The author uses the SPSS 23.0 software to analyze the reliability of the scales and exploratory factor. The analytical results suggest removing and consolidating some observed variables to help the scales evaluate concepts more accurately.

Analyzing the Reliability of the Scales

The verifying of the scales through the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient to identify and eliminate garbage variables avoiding creating false factors when analyzing the Exploratory Factors. The verification criterion is that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient must be greater than 0.6 and the correlation coefficient of the total variable in each scale must be greater than 0.3 (Huu, 2018). The analytical results in Table 2 show that all scales of the factors meet the criteria. Thus, all the scales of the factors are reliable and used to analyze the next factor.

Table 2 SUMMARY OF RELIABILITY AND RELATIVE MINIMUM VARIABLES OF SCALES			
Scales	**Number of variables observed**	**Reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha)**	**The correlation coefficient of the smallest total variable**
Professional performance capacity (PPC)	4	0.817	0.521
Sense of responsibilities for work (SRW)	4	0.792	0.460

Attitude of serving the people (ASP)	4	0.743	0.594
Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (FPCS)	4	0.711	0.443
Local civil servants' competences (ACSC)	4	0.741	0.506

Analyzing the Exploratory Factor

After checking Cronbach's Alpha, the author used the exploratory factor analysis *(EFA)* to preliminarily evaluate the unidirectionality, convergent and discriminant value of the scales. The EFA is used by extracting the Principal Component Analysis coefficient and Varimax rotation to subgroup the factors. With the sample size of 448, factor loading coefficient of the observed variables must be greater than 0.5; variables converge to the same factor and are differentiated from other factors. In addition, the KMO test coefficient must be within the permitted range from 0.5 to 1 (Huu, 2018).

The analysis results in Table 3 show that all factor loading coefficients of observed variables are greater than 0.5; testing Bartlett with significance Sig. =0,000 with coefficient KMO=0.809. All 20 variables after using the EFA are extracted into 4 elements with Eigenvalues values greater than 1 and deviation of over 50%. The research model changes into 4 independent variables and 1 dependent variable which are used for the linear regression analysis and the next hypothesis testing.

Table 3
EFA OF LOCAL CIVIL SERVANTS' COMPETENCES

Observed variables		Factors				
		1	2	3	4	5
Professional performance capacity (PPC)	PPC3	0.794				
	PPC4	0.768				
	PPC1	0.749				
	PPC2	0.691				
Sense of responsibilities for work (SRW)	SRW1		0.779			
	SRW4		0.753			
	SRW3		0.745			
	SRW2		0.682			
Attitude of serving the people (ASP)	ASP2			0.845		
	ASP1			0.841		
	ASP3			0.772		
	ASP4			0.733		
Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (FPCS)	FPCS2				0.757	
	FPCS3				0.731	
	FPCS1				0.702	

	FPCS4				0.677	
Local civil servants' competences (ACSC)	ACSC3					0.766
	ACSC2					0.765
	ACSC4					0.742
	ACSC1					0.721

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The author uses Pearson correlation analysis to analyze the correlation between quantitative variables. With the 5% significance level, the correlation coefficients show that the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is statistically significant (Sig. <0.05). The magnitude of the correlation coefficients ensures that multicollinearity does not occur. Therefore, other statistics can be used to verify the relationship between variables.

Next, the author conducted multiples linear regression analysis on the relationship between the elements of local civil servants' competences. According to Table 4, the R2=0.844 shows that multiple linear regression models are built in accordance with the data set at 84.4%. The results of regression analysis show that 4 independent variables including Professional performance capacity (PPC), Sense of responsibilities for work (SRW), Attitude of serving the people (ASP) and Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (FPCS) have a positive B-factor , which are 0.152; 0.176; 0.156; 0.189, respectively; with the significance <0.05 (Table 4). Thus, the hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 are accepted.

Table 4
REGRESSION RESULTS OF THE LOCAL CIVIL SERVANTS' COMPETENCES

Models	Nonstandardized Regression Coefficient		Standardized Regression Coefficient	Value t	Level of Significance (Sig.)	Collinear Statistics	
	B	Standard errors	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.335	0.005		24.645	0.000		
Professional performance capacity (PPC)	0.152	0.007	0.372	18.277	0.000	0.898	1.131
Sense of responsibilities for work (SRW)	0.176	0.013	0.321	13.963	0.000	0.612	1.493
Attitude of serving the people (ASP)	0.156	0.011	0.353	14.385	0.000	0.667	1.448
Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (FPCS)	0.189	0.010	0.319	19.744	0.000	0.795	1.211
Local civil servants' competences (NLCC)							
R^2 adjusted = 0.844							

Based on the coefficient B (Table 4), it can be concluded that Professional performance capacity (PPC) has the strongest influence on the competences of local civil servants (ACSC), followed by the Attitude of serving the people (ASP) and Sense of responsibilities for work

(SRW). Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (FPCS) are the less influential factors to the competences of local civil servants (ACSC). The obtained linear regression model has the following form:

$$ACSC = 1.335 + 0.152 * PPC + 0.176 * SRW + 0.156 * ASP + 0.189 * FPCS + e$$

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The research results in Table 4 have shown that in assessing the competences of local civil servants, the people are most interested in Professional performance capacity (PPC), followed by Attitude of serving the people (ASP), Sense of responsibilities for work (SRW) and finally Foreign languages proficiency and computer skills (FPCS). From the above research results, the authors propose some following contents for leaders of Hanoi city:

First, attaching special importance to annual professional retraining for local civil servants: This is a matter that should be paid attention to by leaders of Hanoi City. Accordingly, it is necessary to have annual professional retraining for local civil servants so that they can regularly update their knowledge and skills to best meet professional tasks in state management activities at authorities.

Second, paying attention to, fostering and retraining the sense of responsibility for working and attitude of serving the people by local civil servants: Hanoi city should have a plan to regularly foster and retrain civil servants on this in order to impact on their perceptions and thoughts so that they are always ready to work and serve common interests of the people, localities and nations.

Third, properly equipping the basic knowledge and skills of foreign languages and informatics for local civil servants to perform their professional tasks: Although people in Hanoi City are less interested in foreign language and computer skills when assessing the capacity of local civil servants, but Hanoi city still need to have a training plan for each period to ensure civil servants local authorities are equipped and updated with knowledge, foreign languages and informatics skills to better serve the state management professional work.

Thus, by developing a theoretical research framework on the competences of local civil servants, together with the survey results of the people in Hanoi capital, the author has pointed out scientific conclusions and proposed some solutions to state management. The research results are not only meaningful to the managers of Hanoi city in adjusting policies to improve the quality of local civil servants in the future but also to the author himself in the implementation of subsequent research works.

REFERENCES

Cuong, T.V. (2016). *Policy to attract high quality human resources in the public sector in our country today*. Labour-Social Publishing House.

Encyclopedia Publishing House. (2005). *Vietnamese encyclopedia*.

General Statistics Office. (2018). *Brief statistical yearbook in 2017*. Statistics Publishing House.

Huu, D.H. (2018). *Statistical probability and quantitative methods in economics*. Labor Publishing House, Hanoi.

Nguyen, H.H. (2014). Developing the contingent of public administrative civil servants at present. *State Management Magazine, 225*(2), 31-35.

Nguyen, L. (2006). *Vietnamese dictionary of words and phrases*. General Publishing House in Ho Chi Minh City.

Thanh, N.C. (2014). *The quality of public duties performance-A key issue in administrative reform.* Retrieved from www.isos.gov.vn

Trung, N.S. (2016). Training high-quality human resources for civil service. *State Management Magazine, 248*(5), 46-49.

Trung, N.S. (2019). *The local governance*. Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi.